



# The Los Angeles Review of Los Angeles

No. 17 July 2022



THE LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF LOS ANGELES, NO. 17



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COVER BY ROBIN WYATT DUNN



# My Grandpaw Lived

MARY A. TURZILLO

My grandpaw lived on corn fries and carpet tacks, n he smoked meth from when he was three and he lived to be 129 and gave birth to triplets when he was 83, so you can't tell me not to juggle them gators.

Them gators wore their goldurn stilleto heels and they was stars on Drag Queen Alley and I fried them up with angel dust and red-eye gravy and it was real angel dust, not that cheap dirt drug you get in high school. And when I say drag, they drug themselves all the way up here on land, fifteen mile from Catfish Lake and they got teeth like diamond drills.

You want a piece of me? You want to argue with ten generations of tree men? Cause we mated with alligators when there wasn't any women, and when there wasn't any alligators there was always army ants.

Or Bambiraptors, back in the day. You just chuck those babies under the chin and they knock your block off.

My grandmaw wasn't no alligator, though she was as pretty as a Bambisaurus. Lord, the men was after her, and the livestock, too. Once a grizzly got a look at her, and it was all we could do to keep her out of his hairy arms. Put her up on the roof with a pitchfork and a Bible, kept her safe until my grandpaw took him down with a plumber's snake he stole from the Roto-Rooter guy. He just whipped that snake around like it was a goldurn lasso from the rodeo show.

No, I lie. The Roto-Rooter guy give it to him in trade for not killing him cause he looked sidewise at my sister. She was one pretty gal, too.



Overflowing delivery truck  
WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD



Pipes!  
WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD



Grotto Image. Lowell, Mass.  
WILLIAM C. CRAWFORD

# Bright Young Things

PATRICK MCGINTY

We spoke sullen drama

in a cheap hotel room five miles from the city.

It was:

cigarette smoke, cheap wine,  
and a mahogany coffee table

with an old

clay ashtray,  
overflowing.

You said:

I've never felt so cliché.

Like an image clipped from a magazine

you sat with a curious plastic smile,  
then hopped up to your feet,

fingers moving along the ivory keys  
of an invisible piano,

hair tied up in a tight knot,

You said:

Watch me dance,

swallowed a pill  
and smashed another wine glass  
on the hardwood floor.

# How to Paint an American Horse

PATRICK MCGINTY

Someone kicked the couch.

I was still watching  
white horses with long

white manes. White  
horses never change color.

Some of them have blue  
eyes. Some are born

with a genetic disorder called  
Lethal White Syndrome.

They euthanize  
those ones.

# Eden

PATRICK MCGINTY

Your scalp burns like a fevered dream  
as we are baptized in the river.

There is no art from our place in the water,  
only brightly colored oil smeared across canvas.

There is no music,  
only notes leaking from woodwinds.

There is no love, if there ever was,  
only memories of plastic whores  
and dollar bills strewn across asphalt.



# Undeveloped Film in the Backseat

PATRICK MCGINTY

The boy at the table saw with a broken-tooth grin  
and dirty canvas shoes,  
                    he writes in small black letters  
                    on his arm.

All this  
    while music-box prophets laugh  
    and shriek broken phrases  
    from leather-bound books  
    hidden under their beds.

He speaks only through telephones,  
    hoping someone can see his shaking hands  
    or feel the red line of a paper-cut throat.

He hasn't been baptized, but held underwater  
    by the strong arms of a eulogizing mother,  
    and with each gasp comes a song or sonnet;  
    her golden pages can't drown out the sounds  
    that exist in the black burned skin of effigies.

And when the lights dim  
    and the cold air comes through the panes,  
    he shivers, and a burning sensation flows  
    from his feet to his hands.



# The Day the Bears Flew

TOM EUBANKS

Good afternoon. I'm John Singer. And this is Afternoon Newswatch at Four. Our correspondent Jack Cass is in-studio today for a special report about an extraordinary event. Jack.

Thank you, John. Today in California, above awed and calamitous cities, the bears in all the zoos managed mysteriously to flap their paws and soar through the skies with uncanny grace. Earlier, I spoke with Dr. Peter Van Gelder, the Associate Director of Animals Who Never Fly at Los Angeles Zoo in Griffith Park. After a cursory study into this phenomenon and some consultations with scientists from Pasadena's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Dr. Van Gelder said, "Yes. The bears flew."

Animal behaviorists and wildlife biologists have not yet come to a consensus as to why and how the bears

could fly. But the fact remains: the bears flew.

At the Los Angeles Zoo, I spoke to Rev. Bob Bunnell, who was accompanying his Juniors for Jesus on a field trip. He told me he was reading the information placard about the polar bears to his boys and girls, when suddenly it became quiet. The bears in the pool stopped their play, lumbered out, stood upright and vigorously flapped their front paws.

Rev. Bunnell said, "When those bears began to rise up into the air, I thought—praise Jesus!—He's coming back!"

The big question remains: Why would bears fly? Over the next few minutes, we'd like to answer that question. We've asked Rex Murphy, Chief Oceanographer for the California Pacific Marine Research Group, to join us here in the studio, last



minute.

Rex, good afternoon.

“Good afternoon, Jack.”

Rex, at this stage of this event, what are you feeling? What insight do you have? Is this a historical phenomenon or just a phenomenon? How is this possible? Couldn't this be considered—as some have alleged—a crime of nature? Could this be a consequence of global warming? Or eating meat? What are your thoughts?

“Well, Jack, I understood I was here to talk about the dolphin population growth in the Pacific. Since you ask, though—and I'm here already—let me just say this: I have no insights on bears—on land or in the air. I care about the sea. If pilot whales were flying around up there, I'd have plenty to say about it.”

Thank you, Rex. We appreciate your contribution. And now let's go to Jan Vincent in downtown Los Angeles. Jan?

Jack, I'm here in the emergency room of Generally Bad Hospital, and beside me is Mrs. Lupe Lopez. Mrs. Lopez, tell us why you're here today.

“I am . . . *Soy aquí porque me niño*, Raul, was heet. Very bad heet. *Aquí. En la cabeza*—hees head.”

What happened, Mrs. Lopez?

“Raul ride bicycle in front of house. Big poo—how you say?—bear poo-poo—can I say that—?”

You just did.

“—fall from sky and heet Raul and knock into street! *Muy malo*, I no like—*no quiero hablar, por favor!*”

Thank you, Mrs. Lopez—here's some Kleenex. As you can see this is an emotional event for many people. And that's the story from here, Jack. Back to you.

From the business world, we have Jake Hoffman's report from San Francisco . . . .



Jake Hoffman, reporting live from the offices of Retina Incorporated. As you can see behind me, this tall, glass and steel building suggests it houses Bay Area financial wizards and billionaire entrepreneurs, and that suggestion is indeed true. And way up on the 33rd floor, sitting atop 25 floors of cozy condos—excuse me, atop (one, two, three, four) 32 floors of cozy condos—the brains are pouring and the coffee’s working—excuse me, the coffee’s working and the—wait a sec—the brains are working and the coffee’s *pouring*. That’s it. Retina Incorporated obtained the only known photographs taken of the bears in flight and stated they will use the photos to create beautiful wall posters and calendars.

We were allowed to view some of these photographs in the Retina vault and *they are stunning*. The photographs were taken by veteran wildlife photographer, Cecily Young, from a small airplane at an altitude of 30feet—excuse me, 3000 feet.

When asked about the aeronautical skills needed for the shoot, Ms. Young was quoted as saying, “I didn’t fly the plane.” She did say, though, that it was exhilarating to watch the bears in flight, navigating beneath the clouds and performing loop-the-loops and heart-wrenching suicide dives. However, there had been one minor disappointment during her time capturing these wonderful images, when one pair of bears unexpectedly copulated in mid-air. Ms. Young stated that they will Photo-Shop the images and render them to leaving only the big grins on the bears’ faces.

“It will be the perfect family calendar for the home,” she said, “especially for children, who will have the chance to experience the gentle playfulness in nature.”

Jake Hoffman. KNOW News, San Francisco. Jack?

I’ve just received a report from Hawthorne, California. A spokesperson for Mattel Incorporated reported that their top toy designers and engineers



are working around the toy clock to produce a remote control bear that flies. Mattel's Executive Director for Toy Names told reporters the remote control flying bear will be called Sky Bear. They expect to begin manufacturing six million of them by June in time for Christmas.

And now, Jan Vincent, our Roaming Reporter, has a live interview. Jan?

Jack, I'm in Topanga Canyon, speaking with shoe-gazer composer Rufus Moonshadow. Is Moonshadow your stage name?

"Hey, I dunno, man. I was just reaching cosmic consciousness, see, sixth chakra, picking the sleep out of the corner of my third eye, and something snapped and blew me into a state of being as a Kabbalah bat—which was scary, to say the least, man, and before I knew it, I was a moon ray. Trippy.

"But then the whole bitchin' process beamed through

my third eye and I realized the truth, the dark side of the truth, and I became a moon shadow, man, because all my life I've suffered, see, and I've reconciled with myself by reversing my destiny through a metaphysical plane, like an energy level that hyperbolically orbits my sufferings—zoomin' 'round my head like a planet—and because 'suffer' in reverse pronunciation is "Rufus," it became my real truth, and I took the name as my own—Rufus . . . Rufus Moonshadow."

Suffer pronounced in reverse would be *reb*-foos.

"Cool. Hey, where's my pipe?"

Now, you say you've composed a new song in memory of the day the bears flew.

"Yeah, man. But the day's not done yet and who the hell knows what flying bears are gonna bring, ya know? But you can be sure it won't be turned into a pile of steaming propaganda and character assassination." (Cough, cough.) "You want a hit?"

Maybe later. If you're feeling better, would you sing

your new song now?

“I dunno, man.”

At least give us the title of your composition.

“I don’t believe in no titles, man. Whoa, that’s good shit. Sativa Diva.”

So what inspired you to write the song—besides the fact that the bears were flying, of course?

“My channeler.”

Your channeler?

“Hama Gamma. My *man*.”

My producer’s telling me in my ear, Mr. Moonshadow, to encourage you to reconsider.

“Nah.”

A verse?

“Sure you don’t want a hit?”

A couple lines of lyrics?

“Energy is value, man. Value is energy.”

And what does that mean?

“Means everybody’s *gonna* hear it. When it comes out

on Dead Wrong Records next month. But first we have to get through the dang day! The story ain’t close to being done and you’re already spankin’ it and puttin’ it to bed. You got half a story, bud! There’s good reason you in broadcasting believe telling two half stories is the same as telling the whole story all at the same time. Makes folks have to drop in more often to keep up with the chaos. It’s all about money, man!”

Thank you, Rufus, apparently it is.

So, Jack, it seems Mr. Moonshadow is restrained by the pursuit of happiness from singing his untitled song about the day the bears flew.

Come on, Rufus. Hum a few bars.

“Nope.”

Jack, it seems Mr. Moonshadow is restrained by contractual obligations from singing his untitled song about the day the bears flew.

“Okay, man, come on. Exit the pyramid.”

I’m trying. It’s low; I’m tall. Need a larger door if



you want any tall people to come visit. Back to you Jack.

Thank you, Jan, for that exclusively pointless report... Down at the San Diego Airport, FAA officials have their own problems. Bears buzz the runways, causing havoc for Air Traffic Control. Radar screens jammed by zig-zagging blips. At first suspected of being UFOs, until news agencies began reporting that the bears in California had escaped from the zoos. When the air traffic controllers learned the blips were just bears in flight, one controller ponderously remarked: “It really, really makes me wonder.”

In my ear they’re telling me we have an exclusive report from our Over-The-Scene Copter. Jason Roberts reports. Jason?

Thanks, Jack. We’re flying at 2300 feet at 54 knots, coming abreast of three American black bears flying in

formation over Pacific Ocean Aquatic Park, and—okay, we’re beside them now and as you can see they have all four legs extended and look like sky divers wearing bear rugs. Only, instead of falling, remarkably these animals are flying! Ah! They’ve spotted the copter! I don’t see any flying cubs between our copter and their mother, so there’s not much danger, but, wow, these bears probably smelled the grease on this aircraft’s propeller from miles away. They knew we were coming long before we ever spotted them. Amazing. Just amazing what fifty million years of evolution has accomplished. See how they communicate by nuzzling snouts? Look at that! What control! What a sight, Jack! This is history in the making! Ah! Wait! They’re slowing their air-speed! They’re rapidly losing altitude! We’ll stay with them as long as we can! Banking hard now! Two of the bears are rolling onto their backs! They have superior control! Like eagles, Jack! Big, furry eagles! Magnificent maneuvering! And down they go into

Kamikaze dives! Diving for the pearl divers at Pacific Ocean Aquatic Park! What grace! What courage! What control! What the—!

This is Jack Cass back at Newswatch headquarters in Los Angeles. We've lost contact. We'll try later to re-connect with Jason Roberts for the rest of that story. When we—excuse me. Thank you, John. I just received a KNOW update. The bears are landing! I repeat: the bears are landing! And our reporter on the scene says the bears don't know where to go, what has happened to them or what to do, and, frankly, I'm intrigued how this reporter knows that, so let's find out! Jesse Carlin, what's happening out there and how do you know so much?

Well, Jack, I paid attention. I'm in Glendale and it's pandemonium! People are scrambling for cover! We shall forever remember what happened on this day,

July 11th, Jack. I foresee our calling this day America's 7/11. It won't quite reach the magnitude of 9/11, but from what I can see around me, the confusion, the screaming, the running, the falling down, the looking into the sky, the pointing at stuff in the sky, this day, this 7/11 will remain in the hearts and minds of the world—well, maybe not the world, but America—at least the West Coast—okay, maybe only California.

Look closely, Jack! There's a bear chewing on laundry in a Laundromat—patrons scurrying for cover behind the Maytags! There's another bear ripping a gasoline hose from a diesel dispenser at the Arco station. If a claw creates a spark—I *think* that's possible—we could all be blown to pieces! I see several bears inside Ralph's market devouring hundreds of dollars' worth of berries and salmon filets. It's crazy. It's frightening. Bears are climbing telephone lines with the precision of a Wichita Lineman. Telephone lines are falling and—that was close! Live wire almost



got me, Jack! We're going to move into the street here where the traffic is snarled. Folks are rolling up their windows! I'd like to think they're rolling them up because of the bears, but I can't really tell, Jack, because, well, I think they're looking at *me*.

Someone is screaming over there! We'll try to get closer! It looks like . . . yes, it's a grizzly bear having his way with three storefront mannequins—no, wait! Oh my god, one's a real sales clerk! Get a shot of that, Sid! Oh my god! This is terrible—but great TV! This is very serious! Something has to be done! I see something! Yes! It's the National Guard! They've arrived on the streets, armed to the teeth with tranquilizer guns, and they've begun to humanely shoot the bears! The world needs to see this, Jack!—I know I'm not being very journalism-y—but they need to see the restraint our men and women in uniform are showing right now. It's just plain extraordinary. These are wild beasts, let's not forget—I certainly won't

forget—and these Guardsmen's instinct and training must be to mow the bears down! Just slaughter them all! Viewers may not agree with what they're doing out here, Jack, interfering with bears' freedom, but this is the best reason to support the troops. I think we should all be proud to be Americans right now. That's what's happening, Jack! Jesse Carlin, Glendale!

Reports have steadily trickled in about how the bears are being put down humanely by National Guardsmen, loaded onto trucks and returned to the zoo in Griffith Park.

We are pleased to report that Jason Roberts in our Over-The-Scene Copter has been safely removed from the Pacific Ocean Aquatic Park's pearl diver's pool. He sustained only minor bruises when his head struck the concrete bottom. Reportedly, the impact of his head against the concrete damaged the pool with a six-inch crack. It goes without saying—but, as a reporter,

it's my duty to say something anyway—all the water drained out.

Nearby, Sam's Sportfishing flooded. The owner told us via cell phone that it smells like a reporter was actually there. We, of course, suggested the oily smell may be from the petroleum spilled by the crashed helicopter.

Spokesmen for the park said they will consider suing KNOW's parent company, Finagle Us, for the loss of a half-ton of shellfish. They weren't sure how much they were going to have to sue for, but the spokesman assured us it was going to be for "a *whole* lotta clams."

Now, in San Francisco, unfortunately I have to report that our Bay Area correspondent, Jake Hoffman, was accidentally shot in the mouth with a tranquilizer dart by a National Guardsman. Allegedly, the Guardsman had been aiming for a bear that had crashed into the southern tower of the Golden Gate Bridge. We say "alleged," because, immediately after Jake yelled, "Is

that a bear?" the Guardsman suddenly turned 180 degrees from the bear towards our correspondent and pulled the trigger. More on that story at eleven.

And now this editorial commentary by the vice-president and general mis-manager of KNOW, Jerry Whynie.

Thank you, Jack. Today, the bears flew. What at first seemed like a fantastic display of freedom (a long pause) became a disaster. A disaster (short pause) encompassing numerous reports (tiny pause) of citizens being mauled by (long pause, with emphasis) landing bears. State officials estimate (beat) 1.3 million dollars in personal property damage. But shouldn't we ask (couple beats) what value can be put on the long-term emotional impact of this event? On what will be remembered as (really long pause) 7/11.

It's a shame that zoo officials were so unprepared for the unexpected. And where was FEMA? Where was



the protection? Where is the fine line? Where is the justice? Where is the compensation? Where are we going? Who do we blame? There's got to be someone to blame. There's got to be another story.

This has been a special edition of Newswatch at Four. I'm Jack Cass with John Singer. We hope you'll stay tuned for the Live at Five report for more of our top story of the day and its aftermath.

I see, though, that our time is about up. Have anything you'd like to add to our report, John?

Yes, I do, Jack. Thank you. Earlier today, before the break of the bear story, an historian named Brandon Ellis discovered evidence off the coast of Cap-Haïtien, Haiti, in the depths of the Caribbean ocean, that besides the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, Christopher Columbus had a fourth ship. It was called The Omega. But this fourth ship, for undisclosed

reasons, went over the edge.

Thank you. And good evening.

# Every Hallucination Is A Summer Camp In Which The Teens Are At Risk

JOSEPH GOOSEY

explication be damned    but i need you to know  
i've poured this lava cake    all over my 401K  
it wasn't a tough decision (to keep living)    nobody gave me a choice  
at the butler county library i was nearly murdered by the following  
                 piranha plants                   cannonballs           bosnia-herzegovina  
the backstreet boys    total request live    regret mandates  
                 no erasure here    tonight but the brain cells required  
to remember your favorite recipe    wrestling potato salad  
from the pitties might make me    fantasy father of the sham  
the orgy will have to wait    this year a wolf is gnawing  
on my sunshine of a brain    turning me thoroughly  
to jesus ever see a nativity    scene nobody's bathroom  
was gender specific    guess    we'll have to crash  
this borrowed pontoon    into the cave we imagine  
fuccboi aliens abound    i know it's a "two c's" section



it's a trend i'd prefer to ignore    find me, luxury  
@ the bar    attached to the day's inn  
across from the fountain of invented youth    barnacle bill's  
is totally hiring @ above market value    the smell of fry    of death  
clams    clamming up    fifteen minute wait but the master gardener  
has a daughter who came in first in the the leaf identification olympiad  
will be our executioner    so salty    the air i can't just wait don't  
don't leave we can't it's stuck to my flesh  
these catholics thrive    in the face of zero opposition  
their jump rope's explicit

“this francisco goya image of a tortured prisoner, at the met museum, is still too familiar”

JOSEPH GOOSEY

At 20 I thought just maybe  
BDSM blew holes  
through otherwise  
bullshit values, now  
at 35 it seems only to reinforce the privilege  
money affords not just  
in buying power but  
in leisure time like  
there's a reason people go  
to San Francisco for this shit.

Rent's already unwarranted.

Why not rent some place outside of the home  
in which we can dress up in expensive rubber  
then fight people and charge per view?

Why not have others clean up?



Nobody who's being beaten up  
by the everyday  
pays 3000 a week to do it again  
or maybe they do I don't know  
for sure if this poem was workshopped  
someone would say "don't say maybe"  
commit like you killed it  
hide the sentence in a basement.

Movement is feeling  
you know and don't  
Need to conceal a thing from us  
even if you destroy somebody  
unless it's on our property  
in which case we'll ask you  
to go halvesies on a defense.

Misery tourism isn't synonymous  
with reality, getting a grip  
or growing horns.

# Sometimes I Feel Afraid The Customers At My Table Are A Destructive Cabal Sent From An Alternate Past

JOSEPH GOOSEY

in which I never drank the poison water  
supplied by DuPont.

In DC, Dr. Sinan told me  
there would never be side-effects  
from any drug  
he would ever prescribe.

Sinan was a blowhard  
& had too many questions  
about sexual predilection  
on his new patient intake forms.

So I never saw his ass again  
& hoped his Mercedes would explode  
while everyone was looking.

Speaking of Sinan,  
a minute ago I meant to get up  
& check the toilet for evidence

but, being self-diagnosed, I only poured a glass  
of Gallo Family Pinot,  
left that in the rented kitchen,  
began to write an email  
no one will see,  
read *Unveiled!*

*6 Helpful Money-Making Tips*

*From The 5 Wealthiest Americans Or*

*Why The Moon*

*Could End The World By 2030,*

wondered whether you enjoy being a doctor of sleep medicine,  
whether you help people exist  
in a more tolerable manner.



# Just Do It!

MIKE SCOFIELD

Ashley and Kyle met at a “Just Do It!” workshop, the latest Corporate effort to raise the productivity of Independent Contributors. It was a course of inspiration that molded the basics of predecessors like ‘High Performance Organization’ into a lean but meaty message: ‘Just Do It!’. As the Instructor-Led Training observed, “We...”

“Just Do It!” shouts the Limited-to-28 workshop.

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Minnoe wrestled with his Inappropriate Comments spreadsheet. One recent addition, ‘You mean there’s some loser keeping track of every time somebody says ‘fuck’ in a meeting?’ was giving him fits. Under what section did that fit? Profanity? Ridicule? Non-Productive Comment? It was all three but could only be one. Minnoe struggled.

His work within Corporate Ethics/Human Relations was important and being slow to categorize this Comment was a symptom of procrastination...

“Procrastination is Career Stagnation!” sprang from his lips automatically.

He was having trouble focusing on the mundane because of the latest issue to rock his office: Non-Job Related Physical Contact Between Employees. Aside from handshakes, there were only two Job Descriptions with allowable PCBE. First Responders and the people down in Medical. But reports were coming in of unsanctioned hugs, caresses and even more between workers.

Minnoe blamed ‘Just Do It!’. He even saw the irony for his own current predicament. ‘Just Do It!’ was supposed to cure procrastination but here he

was hesitating to work on one of his responsibilities because of it. And he really could see that it was causing problems. People were touchy-feely now where they weren't before. When he first heard the name of the new initiative he couldn't believe it.

“Are they kidding?” he said to his boss, Lumpkin. “We'll have Business Hours Fornication like never before. Why couldn't they call it ‘Just Get Busy!’ or ‘What Are You Waiting For?’. Too many of these people are already disgusting animals, like the two that were caught on the roof last month. ‘Just Do It!’ will tell them to hump in droves.”

Lumpkin nodded. “How's the spreadsheet coming along?”

“Still building. But I keep getting pulled away from it. Frankly, ‘Just Do It!’ is generating so many Inappropriate Comments that I'm having trouble keeping up. So much data!”

Lumpkin nodded. He turned back to his computer

screen. “Just do it.”

\*\*\*

Ashleigh and Kyle began in the workshop at the same table and encouraged each other to ‘Just Do It’ throughout the first day. They spent lunch giving each other personal background.

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“If they're not jumping each other's bones yet, they're pretty close.”

Minnoe listened gravely to Annette, the AdMin from Physical Plant.

“I was behind him yesterday in the hall and I could see her up ahead. She GLOWED when he got near. I thought she'd bust right out of her fitted top!”

Minnoe nodded, again gravely, to encourage Annette.

“And when they passed each other, they leaned in, looked deeply into each other's eyes, and said ‘Just Do It!’”

Minnoe hissed, “Just Do It!” He shook his head. “I know Ashleigh,” he said, wearily. “But Kyle?”

“An engineer from 3.”

“Kyle from 3.” He nodded. “I’ve got them in my sights. Thanks, Annette. You keep in touch.”

She peered up and down the hall and then at Minnoe. “You bet.” And faded back into Physical Plant/Asset Management.

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“I’m getting some Push Back,” said Lumpkin. “They’re saying you’re too much. That you can’t track everything everyone says.” He held up his hand to ward off Minnoe’s erupting objection. “I know. We can’t just let this place go to heck. What I need – what we need – is for you to make a big statement. Show them the value of your work.”

“The value of my work is a civil, respectful, serious workplace.”

“But how do we measure that? What are the

metrics? Can you put something together that shows improvement from when you started up to now?”

Minnoe frowned. “Well, actually, the negatives are up...”

“Exactly. We’re not seeing the positives of your work. You’re recording what is wrong with our people but not using it to improve their productivity. It’s time you Mined that Negative Data Ore for a Nugget of Profit.”

“It’s hard to find the time...”

“An outline of your new project on my desk by Friday.”

\*\*\*

Annette and Minnoe glanced mock-casually down the hall at Ashleigh and Kyle.

“Do they think they’re in some pickup bar?” Annette made a face. “It’s disgusting!”

“They’re really pushing it,” he agreed. The two down the hall separated with pats on the arms. “I think they’ve crossed the line into Flagrant Workplace



Flirtation.” He got a good look at Kyle as the younger man headed their way. Kyle locked eyes with Minnoe for an instant then looked away.

Annette couldn’t help herself. “You think?” She did not hide her disapproval while Kyle passed. She even looked him up and down and made a show of thrusting her nose in the air while turning away to Minnoe. “I hope you take care of them soon.”

“Soon.” Minnoe sighed. “I need a Win.”

\*\*\*

Minnoe was building a Project Spreadsheet that would turn Negative Data into Positive Data when Annette called. “Come see me,” was all she said before hanging up. He stared at his monitor. ‘Just as well,’ he thought. “There are no nuggets here.”

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“Our little friends have found themselves a clubhouse to play in.” Annette smiled triumphantly.

Minnoe’s eyebrows shot up along with his adrenaline.

“I did some investigating. They’re both ADP Reps for their departments. They have access to the ADP Storage Room on 7.” She refreshed her smile. “Ashleigh reserves it for half an hour every Wednesday at 1. Kyle gets it at 1:30.”

Minnoe gazed at her seriously and then fondly. A weight lifted from his shoulders. “That’s just what I needed!” He looked up to the imaginary heavens and back to Annette. “That’s GOLD!”

It was Thursday. He had the afternoon to start, revise and polish a new – Godsend! – of a project. He would have it on Lumpkin’s desk on Friday. In time! And by next Wednesday he would have it approved and activated.

\*\*\*

Minnoe, in his boss’s doorway, tapped the project folder, inhaled impatiently.

“Yeah yeah... I’m coming.”

But Lumpkin wasn’t coming. He was running

through the email trail – again – that would cover him should their surveillance prove illegal, or worse, job ending.

“Uh...” Minnoe couldn’t control himself. “We...”

Lumpkin waved him off without looking back. “A second.”

Minnoe’s stomach churned. All his work and its big payoff would be left in the dust of the ADP Storage Room if they walked in late. They still had to stop at Human Resources to pick up an Official Witness and then to Security to make it legal.

“Uh...”

“Keep your shirt on!” Lumpkin tapped a bit, perused some more, tapped. Finally, he belched, saved everything and locked his screen. “OK, let’s go.”

\*\*\*

It was possible that Minnoe appeared overly enthusiastic but Carol Arndt frowned at him when he stepped into her doorway at HR. But, no, she was

going to frown the entire time. At least Lumpkin got a nod. Taking firm control, her shoes clicking the hard corporate floor, she stepped past them and clicked out into the hall to lead them in their mission.

“To Security then?”

\*\*\*

“Schell, Ashleigh entered the area at 13:02.”

Minnoe, Lumpkin, Arndt and Gary Rokitowski, Manager of Physical Security, stood behind Security Specialist Elijah Potter at the computer.

“She’s alone. Wait... Someone is swiping in...” Potter studied the monitor more closely. “Bogardus, Kyle has entered.”

Potter looked up expectantly to first one side behind him and then the other. The four shot glances at one another. All were thinking it but no one would say, ‘How long before they start screwing?’ For another awkward moment they all stared at the screen.

“Potter, where’s the uniform I asked for?”

Rokitowski asked, just as SP T. Budesheim stepped into the cubicle. So he answered his own question with “Let’s go.”

\*\*\*

Minnoe strode along the hall behind the others. He had trouble maintaining the grim and purposeful countenance he felt he should carry as the others did. Look at the management spotlight his project captured! They were a team following his playbook. And it included a guard!

\*\*\*

“Stay here at the entrance,” Security Manager Rokitowski ordered the SP as he swiped his badge through the card reader. Rokitowski was through the door on the first submissive click of the lock with HR Manager Arndt riding his wake, the sharp attack of her high heels somehow mysteriously left behind.

Lumpkin turned to give Minnoe a manager-in-the-headlights look before hurrying after Arndt. Inside,

quickly trying to capture the sound and vision before them, eyes wide as satellite dishes, they were speechless to what they confronted.

“Oh!” Ashleigh’s eyes went bright when she saw the group. “We’re just practicing!”

She stood to the side of a medium-sized wall monitor displaying a dramatically jagged chart in electrifying primary colors. Kyle stood on the other side clutching a ream of notes and a remote. The four invaders stared wordlessly.

Icy fingers, first of confusion and then of failure and finally of full-scale, life-changing defeat swept up Minnoe’s spine. His brain needed to build a defense – fast! – but had all it could do to keep him breathing.

“Your presentation is about...?” Arndt offered.

Minnoe read the chart’s coordinate labels: ‘Productivity of Individual Contributors’ was the left hand vertical scale; ‘Frequency of Action by Corporate Ethics/Human Relations Office’ was the horizontal



scale. The chart dropped sharply down to the right like a path into the Grand Canyon.

“We decided to collaborate while attending the ‘Just Do It!’ workshop,” said Ashleigh. “We felt strongly that the actions of Corporate Ethics was hurting productivity so we began gathering the data that our project interprets.”

“And your finding?” A new voice... Kyle’s manager from 3, Jim Terlecky, stood behind Minnoe with Kim Andreesen, Ashleigh’s manager.

Kyle waved the ream at the monitor. “This slide sums it up: Productivity goes down as Corporate Ethics activity increases.”

“Excuse me,” said Rokitowski sharply. “Is there a Security issue here?”

Kyle and Ashleigh looked to their bosses but Arndt answered.

“No.”

Rokitowski turned back against the people blocking

his exit. They moved for him. “I need to talk to Mr. Lumpkin’s manager,” he said as he left. Out in the hall, his angry “Let’s go!” to SP Budesheim rang like a hammer on steel.

Lumpkin turned on Minnoe. “We will investigate and critique this. Get your notes – and anything else you’ve got – now!”

Arndt countermanded him: “This will require more than a Sub-Division Inquiry. Please put it together.” She underlined this with a venomous smile. “Today.”

Minnoe just wanted to get away from the ADP Storage Area as fast as he could but Lumpkin stood between him and the exit. Physical Violence was not unheard of in the Corporation. He was not going to get within punching distance of his boss. So he had to stay and listen to Carol Arndt.

“Ashleigh! Kyle!” she said with genuine pleasure, “I’m so glad you took the tools given to you in the workshops and applied them to this initiative!” Her

head swiveled to take in Minnoe for a moment – his anus puckered – and then swung back to the two young heroes.

“I know I speak for Jim and Kim when I tell you that your work will be known to the people at the very top of the Corporation. I will make sure that that happens.”

She spun around to lead the way out. Minnoe waited behind everyone else. He couldn't look at Ashleigh and Kyle. They stayed behind. He hung his head and fell in.

\*\*\*

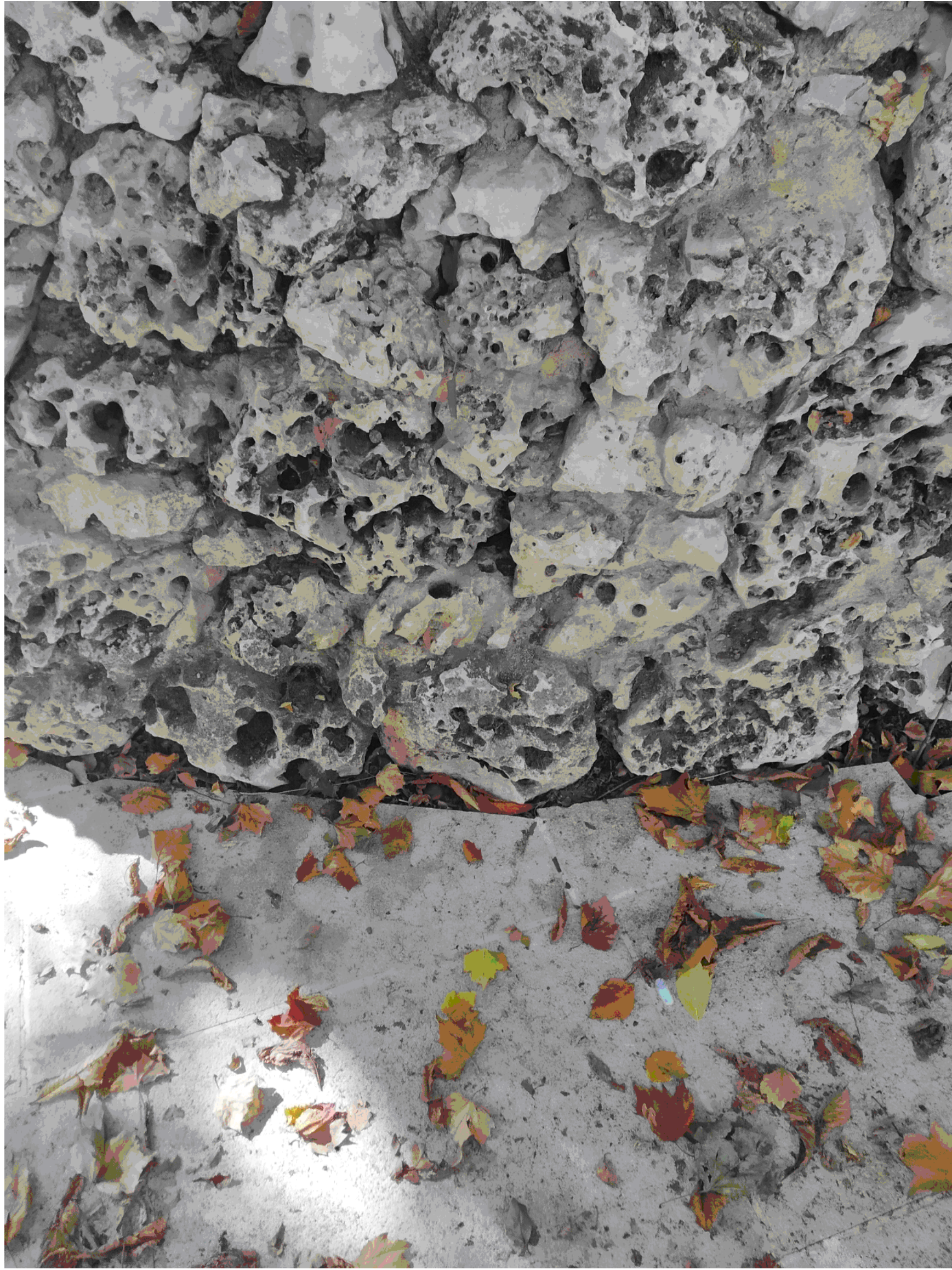
“Finally!” said Ashleigh.

She unbuttoned her blouse, removed it and folded it neatly on a file carton.

“How long do you think we can do this before they get suspicious again?” Kyle asked while shedding his pants.

“Right now, I don't care.” Then she moaned, “Just Do It!”





# Paseo de la Isla' Skullskissingleaves

DANIEL DE CULLA



# Cracking eggs

DS MAOLALAÍ

on the black  
chip-board  
countertop,  
an eggshell-  
bright sunday  
afternoon.

they droop  
to the pan,  
threading lines  
like loose spiderweb,  
expanding  
into sizzle  
and to fry,

hot circles roaring  
and floating on oil  
like maps  
of the world  
set to fire.

# Last chance

DS MAOLALAÍ

they've said that the  
pender'syard market  
up stoneybatter  
will openfrom lockdown  
this weekend perhaps;  
social distancingpolicy  
obviously in place,  
and time limits logged  
while you browse  
for tomatoes.

we walked past  
this afternoon,  
getting canned food  
from centra.  
they were setting  
up already,  
and in the centre  
the overweight man  
who owns the property

leaned back  
topless, taking one  
last chance, sunning  
his belly  
from a plastic  
garden chair.

# After the Election, 2020

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

it's OVER

whelming

darkness

the creeping red  
into the garden. the blossom

I align with the ocean  
in its magnitude of idealism

I align with my self-  
deprecating friends  
my honest to  
whatever god makes  
them actually brings  
them happiness I want  
to live a little less  
for my own interests  
if I can help  
you bring yourself  
to light instead I  
think you can call  
the results  
a little more  
often, the god  
of who we want  
to be, the presidents  
we are



# Late-Stage Capitalism

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

Worth inextricably tied to the throttle  
I am unable to press forever and  
ever, amen, where to lie  
down and get some rest, hallelujah,  
livin' by the bottle without drinking  
anything alcoholic, not tonight  
at least, not before the long drive  
to work, paved highways, praise,  
hell on the range is to pay  
all your bills at once  
and wait a month.

# A Very Short Affair

ROBERT P. BISHOP

My name is Donald Harper, but people often call me Donny the Dwarf, sometimes to my face, but mostly behind my back. If they are the sensitive type, they might call me a person of short stature to make their remarks about my height socially acceptable, but I'm not buying it. Deep down, people are pretty much assholes.

I'm not bummed out by being called a dwarf because that is what I am, all three feet, eleven inches of me. The medical term for my condition is achondroplasia. For you fuck-offs who demand specifics, achondroplasia is caused by a mutation in the FGFR3 gene on chromosome four. This mutation causes short arms and legs. The head and torso, however, are normal in size. There are no treatments or hormone therapies to counter achondroplasia. I am forced to live in the body genetics has given me. Small size has its advantages, though. I'm never seen as a physical

threat. I mean, who would be afraid of me? I'm three-feet, eleven, for Christ's sake. In a fist fight what am I going to do, bite my opponent on the ankle or gnaw off his fucking kneecap?

My size makes people underestimate my intelligence. Having a small body does not mean I have a small or deficient brain. On the contrary, I'm smart, have a Ph.D. in mathematics, and teach at the U. That's great cover; whoever heard of a dwarf math prof becoming an assassin?

I prefer to call myself an assassin and not a killer. The word killer suggests a brutish person, unrefined and coarse, a thuggish low-brow. That is not who I am. The word assassin evokes an image of a mysterious person who emerges from the dark, takes out his target then fades into the shadows without leaving a trace. Like smoke

disappearing into air. Like the scent of perfume lingering in a memory.

Becoming an assassin wasn't something I aspired to, and, honestly, had never thought about. It just wasn't on my things-to-do-before-I-die list. Until I met Emily Bannon...and got a look at her tits.

\*

Faculty parties are a bother for me, not because I am socially inept, but because people are unnerved looking down on me from a two-foot-plus height advantage when we are trying to have a conversation. They're uncomfortable, sometimes embarrassed, by their normal size and body proportion and don't really know how to act. I do the best I can to accommodate them, but it's not my responsibility to make them feel at ease.

\*

Dr. Redijen Mohan Redijen's spacious home was crowded with droll and dreary academics celebrating his elevation from Chair of the Physics Department to Dean of the

College of Science. After saying hello and exchanging pleasantries with several professors, I made my way to the snacks table to graze on the goodies. I filled a plate, grabbed a bottle of water then found a table off to the side, sat down and popped a tuna fish canape into my mouth.

"May I join you?" said a voice behind me.

"Please do," I replied without turning my head.

A woman in her mid-thirties sat down opposite me. "I'm Emily Bannon," she said. "Fred Bannon's wife."

I got up, went around the table and extended my hand. "Don Harper, math." Her hand felt warm and dry. She held my hand a beat longer than necessary then let go. Her low-cut black dress displayed stunning cleavage. I looked. Emily laughed. She knew what I was doing. "I don't often get the chance to check out a woman's cleavage," I said with a smile. "It's a major disadvantage of being short, so I never pass up an opportunity to look, especially when the cleavage is as magnificent as yours." I went back to



my side of the table.

She laughed again, leaned toward me and exposed more cleavage. “Is everything about you short?”

Damn, I liked this woman. “If you’re asking is my dick short, the answer is no, but you won’t find out. I don’t do married women.”

“Well, that’s a pity. What if I wasn’t married?”

“Then you’d get your question answered tonight.” I gave her my best grin.

The banter wasn’t uncomfortable for either of us. The spark was there, and both of us knew it.

We chatted about the university and each other for a while then a man approached, put his hand on her shoulder and said, “I see you’ve met Donny the Dwa... Math Professor.”

“Nice recovery, Fred,” I said and ate another canape.

“Is my wife boring you with her tedious talk of me, Donny?”

“She hasn’t said one word about you, Fred. Your

reputation remains as always.”

Fred turned to Emily. “I’m going to mingle for a while. You can stay here and visit with Donny. I know you dislike these faculty gigs.”

“Do what you usually do, Fred. I’ll be fine.”

“All right, I’ll leave you two girls to your gossip.” He walked back to the buzzing crowd of academics, by now well lubricated with alcohol and acting more important than they really were.

“I hate that son of a bitch,” Emily said and took a good hit of her drink. “I wish he was dead.”

The venom in her voice startled me. “That’s pretty harsh. Why don’t you divorce him?” I ate another canape.

“See that young thing next to him?”

I turned to look, saw Fred standing next to a tall slender blond in black pants cinched so tight around her waist her ass stuck out like Mount Fuji. “She’s hard to miss.”

“She’s his newest grad student. He only takes on female grad assistants, and he fucks every one of them. He’s

going to take me home in a few minutes then tell me he has to go to the lab to check on some experiment. He'll get home about three in the morning, after he's fucked that bimbo for a couple of hours."

"Why don't you leave him?"

"I'd rather see him dead first. Is it unladylike for me to say I would give anything to piss on his grave?"

"Jesus, Emily, I don't know. The image of you baring you ass to the wind and pissing on Fred's grave kind of blows my mind." I ate another canape.

"If I divorce him, I don't get anything. I signed a pre-nup so I'm stuck with him until he dies, then I get everything. Fred's rich and I want it all when he's dead."

"That's too bad about the pre-nup." I ate another canape.

"Yes, my mistake. You know he calls you Donny the Dwarf, don't you?"

"And about a million others. There is nothing I can do about that except beat every one of those assholes

academically, which I do on a regular basis. It's my revenge."

Emily finished her drink. "I'd give a hundred thousand dollars to see that man dead."

Hmm, I thought. That's a lot of money. "Do you have a hundred k just lying around?"

She leaned toward me. More cleavage. I groaned. Emily licked her lips and grinned. "I do. In cash. It's my mad money. Fred doesn't know about it."

Now I'm interested. "Give me your phone number." She recited it and I remembered it. Numbers are my game. I don't need to write everything down.

"Here he comes. Right on time. We're going to leave now."

Fred approached. "It's time to go, Em."

She stood up. "It's been nice meeting you, Dr. Harper. I enjoyed our visit." She extended her hand. It was still warm, the grip just as firm.

"The pleasure is mine, Mrs. Bannon." I turned to Fred.

“Good seeing you again, Fred.” Bannon took his wife’s elbow and propelled her toward the door. I saw him give a nod to the blond as he and Emily left.

The party turned dreary. I sought out Dr. Redijen Mohan Redijen, congratulated him again on his promotion, and went home. I lay in bed in the dark, thinking about Emily pissing on Fred’s grave. There was a problem with that. She couldn’t do it if Fred was alive. And there was that hundred grand, in cash, stashed somewhere, crying out to be spent. By me.

And not to be overlooked were Emily’s magnificent tits. That cleavage was so deep it made the Mariana Trench look like a furrow in a farmer’s field.

I started thinking.

\*

One week later I bought two throw-away phones and called Emily on one of them.

“Dr. Harper, how nice to hear from you. I’ve been thinking about you quite a lot lately.” Her voice was cool,

confident. I liked the sound of it.

“Call me Don. And I’ve been thinking about you. Why don’t we meet this afternoon?”

“I’d like that.”

\*

Emily sat down on the bench next to me. We watched the river for a while without saying anything.

“Give me your cellphone.” She handed it to me. I turned it off and gave it back. The portable radio-frequency detector in my pocket stopped vibrating. There were no electronic signals coming from or being projected onto us. It was safe to talk.

I handed her one of the burner phones. “These are throwaways. Difficult to trace. I’ll call you on the one I just gave you. Don’t use it for any other calls.”

Emily nodded and put it in her purse.

“Do you still want Fred dead?” Rhymes played in my mind...*dead Fred, Fred dead, Fred dead for bread, dead Fred’s worth some bread. Jesus.*



“Yes.” Emily didn’t look at me.

“Have you ever told anyone else you want Fred dead?”

“No. You’re the only one.”

“Why did you tell me?”

“I thought you would understand humiliation.”

“Consider it done.”

Emily didn’t say anything. “Why?” she finally asked.

“You have two things I want.”

“Oh?” This time she looked at me. “What are they?”

“A hundred grand and magnificent tits.”

Emily laughed out loud, a gurgling, throaty sound. “You just named three things. I thought you were good with numbers.”

I waved my hand and grinned. “Semantics. A bonus for you is I dislike Fred as much as you do.”

“When will you do it?”

“Soon.”

“That’s all you’re going to say?”

“Do you really want the details?”

Emily thought about that. “No, I guess not.”

“How tall is Fred?”

“Six feet three inches.”

“Hunh.”

“Aren’t you worried about getting caught?”

“No.”

“The police aren’t going to take the murder of a physics professor casually. They’ll go all out to find who did it.”

“Let them. They won’t find me.”

We talked some more and considered the future. “When this is over, Emily, I want more than a good look at them. I want to experience them up close and personal.”

“And you will, Don. That’s a promise.”

“We can’t have any more contact until this is finished,”

“I know.” Emily left me sitting on the bench.

\*

Fred Bannon’s height presented a problem. When I shot him, the upward path of the bullet through his body would tell the medical examiner Fred’s assailant was a very short

person. If the medical examiner was any good a reliable height estimate of Fred's assassin might be worked out.

The bullet's path through Fred's body had to be horizontal. A downward trajectory would be even better, but I had to grow at least two feet, four inches for the bullet to have even a horizontal trajectory. How could I gain that height?

Occam's Razor. Keep it simple.

\*

I wasn't going to be wearing them for a long time but I still needed to maneuver with dexterity on the stilts I had cobbled together in my workshop. I practiced several hours a day, getting the hang of walking on them without looking like a drunk or losing my balance and falling.

Everything looked out of proportion from my new height of six feet, four inches. I wasn't used to seeing things from this point of view. I thought about going out on the town so I could look people in the eye and enjoy my new height, then nixed the idea. I didn't want people

to see the new me.

At the end of four weeks, I felt confident walking on the stilts. Now the gun.

I wore latex gloves so I wouldn't leave prints or DNA when I made a sound suppressor out of PVC tubing and absorbent steel-wool pads. I painted the suppressor black and used radiator hose clamps to attach it to a Ruger Mark II .22 semi-automatic pistol with a bull barrel. The pistol and suppressor were two feet long and looked like a fucking Uzi. The perfect weapon for an assassin. I filled two magazines with seven rounds each.

Gunfire is noisy and people respond when they hear it, usually by calling the cops, so I tried the weapon out in my basement, firing several rounds into a block of wood. The shots sounded like somebody saying *fabp* in a loud conversational voice. Anyone a couple hundred feet or more away would not recognize the noise as gunfire. I ejected the magazine and replaced the spent rounds.

Now everything depended on Fred and his nightly

trysts with the blond grad student.

\*

I called Emily on the throw-away. We hadn't talked since our meeting in the riverside park. "Emily," I said without preamble, "When is Fred going to his lab?"

"He's going every night this week."

"What time does he usually leave the lab?"

"On week nights, about ten-ish."

"Will he be there tonight?"

"Yes."

"Good enough." I ended the call.

\*

I parked two blocks away, strapped into the stilts, put on a black overcoat that came to my ankles and walked to the lot where Fred's car was parked. The oleander bushes growing next to the Physics building made good cover. I worked my way into them and waited.

Fred's hand was on the car's door handle when I stepped

out of the bushes and spoke. He looked up. I emptied the magazine, putting all seven rounds into the center of his chest before he dropped to the ground without a sound. I replaced the magazine, put the empty magazine in my pocket and approached Fred. He lay on his back, his eyes open. I fired three rounds into his forehead before walking away.

I dropped the coat at a clothing collection box in a Walmart parking lot. It was a good coat, thick and warm. Some homeless person would be wearing it by morning. Then I drove to the riverside park, disassembled the pistol and threw the parts and suppressor into the river. When I got home I took the stilts apart and burned them in my fireplace.

\*

Fred's funeral was well attended. Emily, dressed in black, looked the part of the grieving widow. She sat in the front pew, just feet away from Fred's coffin bathed in colored sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows.

She dabbed her eyes with a frilly white handkerchief. She looked stricken with grief.

I approached. As solemnly as I could I said, “I am sorry for your loss, Mrs. Bannon.”

“Thank you for your sympathies, Doctor Harper. You are too kind.” She looked at me and winked. A smile graced her lips then vanished just as quickly. I walked to the back of the church and sat near the door so I could make a quick getaway when the service ended. No way was I going to the grave-side ceremony, not with a boner so hard it could drill holes in steel plate.

\*

A month after Fred’s funeral, I called Emily on the burner phone. “Emily, Don here,” I said when she answered.

“I’ve been waiting for your call.”

God, I liked the sound of her voice.

“You’re not a married woman anymore, Emily. We know what that means.”

“We do.”

“I live up Topanga Canyon. The entrance to my drive is surrounded by eucalyptus trees and easy to miss in the dark.” I gave her my address.

“I’ll find it. GPS, you know. I’ll see you eight o’clock Friday night. We’re going to have the weekend together. I like soft music and red wine.”

She hung up without giving me a chance to reply.

\*

After popping two bottles of red, I lit the logs in the fireplace, turned down the lights and streamed some soft instrumentals.

I waited, eager for Emily to arrive.

Emily surprised me by entering without knocking. She dropped a paper sack on the coffee table. “My mad money. It’s all there.” She walked to the fireplace and stood with her back to me. “Pour me some wine, please.” Emily dropped her coat to the floor and turned around. She wasn’t wearing anything under the coat.

“Whoa, there is a god,” I said, and handed her a glass



of wine.

\*

Emily lay on the bed and watched as I took off my clothes. “Now we’re going to get up close,” she said and reached for me. I fell into her open arms and felt them close around me.

\*

We lay quietly for several minutes, too exhausted to speak, then Emily giggled and said, “I certainly got my question answered.” She reached for me, pulled me on top. Her arms encircled me and held me tight, trapping my arms by my sides. “Now let’s get personal,” she said and rolled over, pinning me with her body weight and burying my face between her breasts. I didn’t resist. When Emily didn’t release me, I became alarmed and started to struggle. I was no match for her surprising strength. She held me so tight I couldn’t breathe. I struggled but to no avail. I was trapped. My heels hammered against the mattress. She held me fast, my face jammed between her tits. I began

to feel faint from lack of air and knew I was going to pass out. The last thing I heard was Emily saying, “Is this up close and personal enough for you, Don?”

\*

Emily slipped on her coat, put the wine glass in a coat pocket, picked up the sack with the mad money and walked to the bedroom. She looked at Don Harper’s body, naked and motionless on the bed. She upended the bag and scattered the money over his body. Emily jammed the empty bag into a coat pocket and said, “I’m sorry, Don, that our affair was so ... short,” before walking away.

# The Rise and Fall of Piggy Spaffie-Butt

RUDI ROCKER

Behind the schoolboy rhetoric and dandelion fuzz lies an unlikely front runner for PM of Great Britain whose populist anti-immigrant tirades and 'All British', free market thinking have divided the Tory party and reignited the race to No.10.

Spaffie began his improbable political rise to fame working for his father's company. As one of the most ruthless and controversial property barons in modern history, Spaffie successfully 'survived,' bankruptcy, rent stabilisation programs and a slump in the property market to emerge as a golden phoenix of the British Dream. His celebrity status sealed when he became the face of Sky's 'reality' tv show, 'The Knicker King', beaming him into people's living rooms all over the world. The hit show resulted in a variety of lucrative spin offs and the cult persona of: 'Butt,' was born.

Despite Sky pulling ties with Spaffie after his derogatory remarks about Muslim Pakistani immigrants, the fire had been lit. So, how has the self-acclaimed Svengali of the adult diaper world, with no coherent political philosophy to speak of become the leading candidate for PM of Great Britain?

Is he as some stalwart Spaffie supporters claim an anti-establishment hero, or dangerously narcissistic with self-deluded convictions? He brags he can make his country 'great again,' and be the 'greatest jobs PM ever.' Certainly, classic traits of the clinical disorder manifest themselves in his trademark bravado: lack of empathy self-superiority, and the continuous need for grandiosity. His company track record boasts not, two, three, but a dozen tabloid scandals, one has to admire the tenacity of his can-do spirit. He appears invincible.

Serious political pundits have dismissed his rising appeal but largely ignored his social media savvy. Some might say his stats are even more impressive than a playboy centrefold: Over 4.5 million face book fans, 5.5 Twitter listeners and high ranking followers on You Tube, Vine, and Instagram. So, you can't escape him, just like toilet cleaner he is omnipresent.

Who needs outdated tv ads when 15 minutes on Instagram will do the trick. Lo fi, cheap and easily accessible they cost virtually nothing to produce and are often picked up by mainstream news media. Spaffie's clever use of social channels earn him free publicity and a dominance on social media compared to other candidates.

The Spaffie Butt media team also produce short sharp videos with 'judgement day,' music and selective soundbites Surprisingly the Butt Channel has in excess

of 1.3 million views. Like a real PM in waiting Butt has announced a regular Q and A session on Tik Tok.

He's not the first political candidate to embrace new media to galvanise public support. Leni Riefenstahl's movies used by Dr. Goebbels to puff up Hitler are famous, and the TV candidacy of JFK is well documented, many viewing him as the "First TV President." What is intriguing however, is Spaffie's scathing condescension of mainstream media. He doesn't need them, or trust them. He plays the game, breaking the rules. "You can kiss my fat arse," he seems to say at the red tape, convention of political campaigning and this is the root of his popularity.

### **Real or Fake ?**

There are signs online media is reacting to his 'popularity,' one Twitter Audit study, claimed that only



64% of his followers are ‘real’ as opposed to spam bots spanning from ironically Muslim countries like Malaysia. Spaffie has been targeted for attack by leading hacktivists following his outrageous comments on minorities, and an online petition calling for a ban to his entry to the US netted a whopping 360,000 signatures. There are now dozens of innovative apps to remove all trace of him from the web and even an online poo emoji from Chrome.

Despite impressive polling figures and warning cries from the peeps in the know, Spaffie may be a victim of his own anti-politician, reality tv fame and go down in the annals of history as the spaffed up people’s piggy mascot who became victim of his own celeb hype, because he is pure fantasy a product of the zeitgeist fame train.

## UPDATE ELECTION 2019

A hotly contested election battle saw the opposition crumble and Spaffie sailed into No.10 with a Brexit busting agenda. He promised, interalia, brand new trade deals loadsa money for farmers, more cash in everyone’s pockets, *levelling up* for all, the scrapping of fuel Vat and loadsa money for the NHS. Then on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the first two cases of Covid 19 were confirmed in the UK.

A global pandemic hit that crippled the world’s economy and decimated communities everywhere.

At the outset, Spaffie refused to take questions about the growing crisis from serious political pundits and successfully evaded specific journalists for almost a year. Instead, he appeared on one of Britain’s best loved coffee morning TV shows. A firm favourite with

middle brow mummies where he was interviewed by a former children's TV presenter who first shot to fame at the BBC with a show aptly titled from *The Broom Cupboard*. Spaffie, allegedly, on advice from his PR guru and adopting, a ruthlessly economic approach told an increasingly worried British public that if the disease were allowed to run rampant through the population they could achieve "Herd Immunity," and the disease would eventually fizzle out. Of course, this didn't happen. British people made the ultimate sacrifice and lost their lives to this vicious disease.

## PANDEMIC

Spaffie continued to *dither and delay*. His woeful lack of leadership and inability to initiate an orchestrated response to the Pandemic prompted individuals to raise money themselves for the NHS and source their own PPE equipment. While the nation was busy climbing, walking, crawling, and running to raise millions for

the NHS Spaffie was on the hustle doing deals with a bunch of grotesquely inept cronies. Many fêted with peerages and gobs of dosh while he purportedly fleeced the public purse and treated *taxpayers like his personal ATM machine*. NHS heroes meanwhile working their fingers to the bone were rewarded with a clap, a national pay cut and a tacky little badge.

Spaffie was on a roll; he gloated about death and warned the British people they must accept it.

Much of Spaffie's reign has been plagued with scandals and corruption. Including but not limited to the questionable refurb of Spaffie's home. Eyebrows were raised when Spaffie allegedly used party donations to buy gold wallpaper and other such frippery. Leaked pictures show it looks just like the décor in Shimla Pinks the swish Indian eaterie. Many of Spaffie's inner team, were embroiled in sexual harassment claims, cash

for cruddy honours bullying, extra-curricular marital trysts that breached COVID rules, and illicit Christmas parties. Spaffie even flung one of his closest aides under the proverbial bus when she was watched by millions draped over a lectern sniggering in a mock Press conference about breaching Covid rules. Spaffie was merciless and left her sobbing for clemency on the steps of her London Mews des res.

Many still believe Saffie poses more of a threat than the virus itself. As another wave hits, Spaffie's downward spiral continues. Concerns were raised about his mental health by senior members of his own party and top business aides when he lost his notes at the annual CBI conference. The world watched as he made a string of odd little noises mimicking a sputtering car (later released in a Downing Street transcript as "arrum rum arrrah"), Spaffie then rambled on at length about Peppa Pig, and compared himself to Moses.

## **LOCKDOWN PARTIES at NO.10**

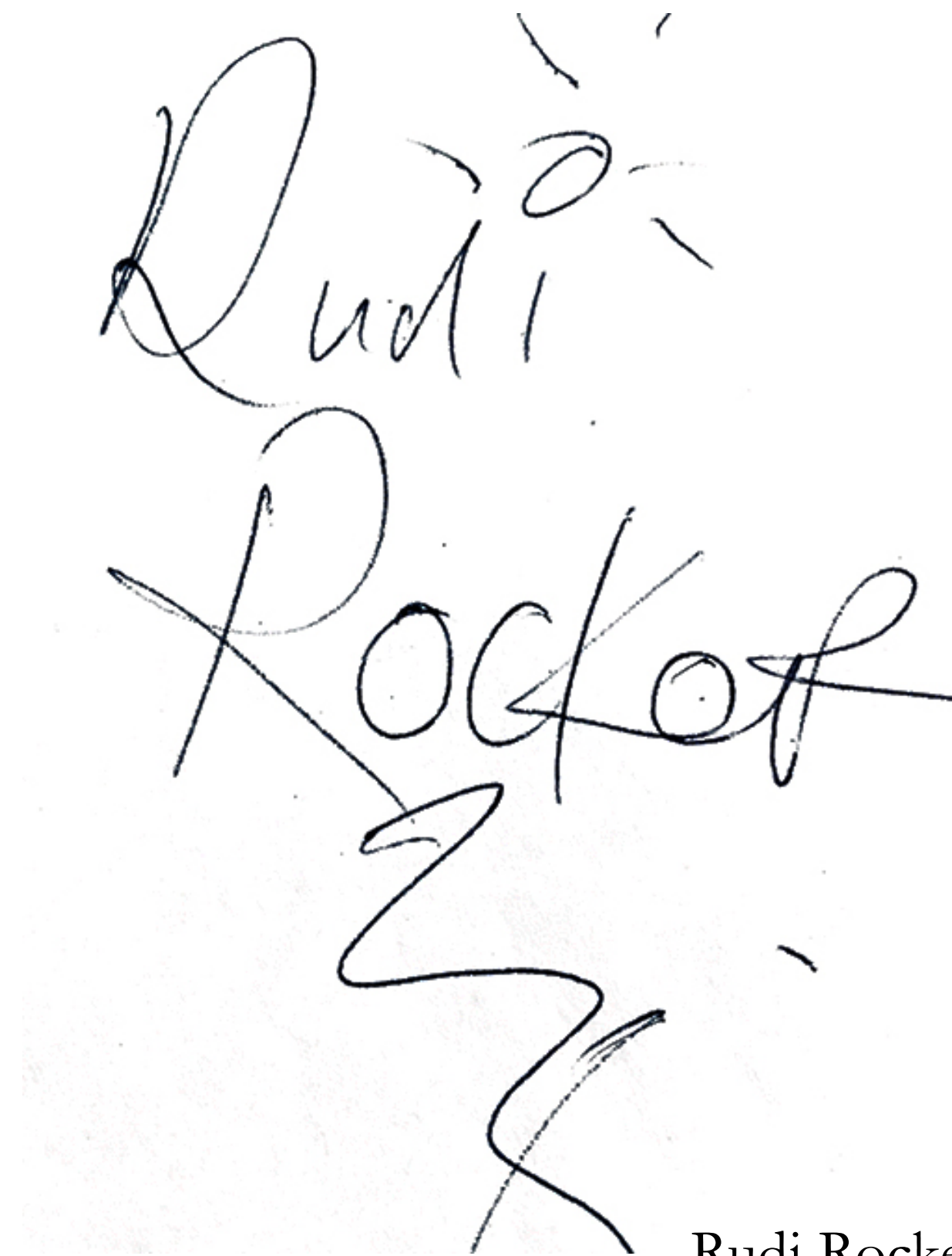
While the country was locked down and no one allowed out: while a sobbing daughter said goodbye to her dying father through a hospital window and a young mother died alone without her five-year-old son by her side or her weeping husband to hold her, Spaffie partied away with tasty nibbles, a specially imported karaoke machine and bring your own booze smuggled in a suitcase. Dancing on the tears of grieving Britons, his arrogant laughter circled the gardens of Number 10 before spanking his meaty lying thighs.

## **Where is Spaffie Now ?**

Spaffie was last spotted at Peppa Pig World enjoying a Grampy Pig Little Train ride. Asked if he was alright, Spaffie gave the thumbs up and let his blonde bouffant do the talking.

## SHAM

Despite the salacious sound bites, inflammatory Etonian spit balling and media manipulation Spaffie's jibber jabber jolly-rancher blather has finally been exposed for what it is **A GLORIOUS but DEADLY SHAM.**

A handwritten signature in black ink. The first line reads "Rudi" in a cursive script, followed by a small circle and a dash. The second line reads "Rocker" in a larger, more stylized cursive script. Below "Rocker" is a long, horizontal, wavy line that ends in a small dash.

Rudi Rocker 2021



# Flushing the Gatorat

MARS NOBODY

Stewart, the notorious alligator-rat creature, lord of the Beverly Hills sewers and celebrity-rump biter, was more frightening, vicious and dangerous than the streets of LA! Dotty and I were beneath Rodeo Drive, on the gatorat's turf, and unbelievably, it had the upper claw! My wife was prone, lying in the sewer's fetid water, where Stewart happily lapped up the blood gushing from her throat, and I was helpless, nearly unconscious after the reptilian rodent fractured my skull. The canny beast had crushed the tank-bot and snapped my versatile cane in half too, requiring only one savage chomp of its jaws per each! We had no back-up, and no way to call for any.

When the Monster Snatchers Inc. team turned from Vine onto Hollywood Blvd. three days earlier, with Mort driving the monster truck, we were greeted by

thousands of people! Crowds lined both sides of the street, five and six deep, with those on the righthand, holdingup signs and banners of support, while the left side cheered for Stewart!

There were two main groups in opposition of our mission to rid the rich and famous, of this menace to the dignity of their sanctified buttocks. The larger herd, with national reach, and which regularly protests outside of TP Barnyard's Monster Land Amusement Park, was well represented here. These Advocates for Co-Existing with Monsters, or ACEM, fought for monster equity.

2

The second set of adversaries was smaller in number, but bigger in dumber, and thus more dangerous. The

Stewartians, a religious cult founded by unsuccessful poet and rap singer Thomas Knox, professed the divinity of the mutant creature of the sewers, known for its proclivity to swim up into occupied toilet bowls, in the Rodeo Drive and Santa Monica hangouts of the rich and famous, and bite a hunk out of a celebrity's precious bottom. The grotesque creature was also known to graze on the ears, noses, fingers and toes, of any drunks or homeless people it crawled upon.

MSI would encounter both of these opposition groups later, but the first thing required of us was a public appearance with the honorary mayor of Hollywood, plus one concerned agent to the stars. It couldn't be avoided. The four of us and Zeus were celebrities too, whether we liked it or not. The press was present in large numbers, and half a dozen microphones projected above a podium on a stage.

The mayor had a hangover, and so made only a short speech to welcome us, before bringing the Hollywood

agent onstage. Mayor Bumstead stood at the podium, wiped his brow, burped and said, "Now, I'd like to introduce Mr. Cameron Ogelthorpe Boffington, renowned agent to many A-list celebrities, and some actors too. Please give a warm welcome to C-O-B." The mayor sweated the first iteration of the lawyer's three-tiered name, and wasn't willing to risk a second go.

Mr. Boffington stood up from a foldout chair, walked across the prefab stage to the dais and looked out over the hundreds of pro and con monster fanatics baking in the warm August sun. He addressed them, and the four of us, who sat in chairs behind him on stage. Zeus lay next to my chair.

3

COB spoke into the forest of microphones, and he said, "Welcome Monster Snatchers Inc., and good luck in your endeavors! A concerned sector of movie industry professionals, has banded together, to collect

a bounty purse, for anyone who could rid this valuable community of the cursed alligator-rat. This club, known as Save Our Cheeks, has collected, and is pledging, six point four million dollars to your organization, if you remove the ass chewing beast from our plumbing!”

Some onlookers cheered his speech, and others booed. He returned to his chair, and now the mayor approached the dais again to say, “Thank you Boff. Now Vincent Hopper, founder and director of MSI, it’s time for you to say a few words.” He waved me up to the podium amid shouts and screams and curses, accompanied by whistles and applause, and a pair of pink panties, which landed at my feet.

The MSI team was well known around the world, thanks to our wildly successful reality TV show, now in its sixth season, not to mention our successful captures of sixlive monsters already, but I introduced each of my team anyway, one by one so they could take a bow and wave to fans and foes alike. Zeus accompanied me

to the podium, so he received first honors. He was a ham, and picked up the panties in his teeth and shook them for all he was worth. Zeus seemed to smile at the laughter and cheers he evoked.

Next I brought up my wonder woman wife Dotty, then her nephew Mortimer Wimplezinger, who specialized in research and planning, but often assisted in the field, and finally our gadget genius, and finally the enigmatic black man known only as Biscuit. The crowd responded loudly and boisterously to each, with mixed boos and cheers.

4

Once some semblance of silence and sanity returned again, I thanked Cameron and the Save My Cheeks coalition for their generous reward money offer. I added, “I can’t promise success, but we haven’t failed yet, and we don’t accept failure! We are coming for you Stewart! Thank You!” Things got wild after that,

when the two opposing sides clashed, and we were glad that limos were nearby to whisk us safely away to our hotel. Our monster truck was parked anonymously, in a secure yard, several miles distant from our hotel, with an armed guard to watch over it. We knew to take precautions; we'd been in LA before.

MSI was put up at no charge, in one of the finest hotels in the land, with three separate suites for the four of us; Dotty and I shared one, as a married couple should! This hotel had in fact, experienced a rash of gatorat toilet terror a few months earlier, even as high up as the sixteenth floor! Some hotel patrons had asked for porta-potties, in fear for their rears.

The mutant gatorat was named Stewart by the press, after the LA dwelling, anti-hero rat of a graphic comic book, but this beast had no resemblance to that talking rodent. This voracious, blood-thirsty gator-rat had begun tearing flesh from bottoms about seven years ago. Experts kept promising the Beverly Hills populace

that the rodent mutant would soon die, because rats had short, quick life spans.

My team of monster experts argued that the creature was a mutant alligator, and would grow slowly and live a century. Stewart did grow, according to its bite marks, which became wider and deeper over the years, and it seemed to be more active than ever recently. It was aging gracefully, like a Hollywood starlet.

## 5

It was about seven-thirty or eight o'clock that first night in town, when Dotty and I sat in bed, fully clothed, and debated whether or not to attend the Stewartian religious service we'd been invited to, tomorrow morning. I am a curious sort, and thought it would be a good lesson in anthropology, while my sensible wife thought it too absurd to be given notice.

I was winning Dotty over, when we heard an urgent knocking on our outer door! I feared it might be some



monster groupie who'd tracked down our location, but was relieved to see Mort, when I peered through the door's peephole.

Mort rushed in; when I pulled the door open. He panted with anxiety, and said, "Hurry! Grab your gear and let's go! Stewart just ripped some actress a new butthole!"

I grabbed my cane and our backpack, and Dotty took her purse, and we raced down six floors of stairs and into the parking garage. We climbed into Mort's rental car and sped the seven blocks to the Rodeo Drive bite site. We counted four police cars, two fire trucks, one ambulance, and a Leo's 24- Hour Plumbing service vehicle, parked haphazardly, on the road and walkway in front of a store.

The lone ambulance pulled away as we came through, and the wounded actress was rapidly whisked away to a hospital. A police car soon followed it, and we parked in one of the vacated spaces. The gatorat attack

occurred inside a pretentious delicatessen, with thirty-five dollar sandwiches, and fifteen dollar coffees. When the three of us crossed the yellow police tape, to enter the exclusive deli, we were stopped by police officer Sgt. Walker.

6

He recognized us of course, and after we all autographed his notepad and let him take selfies with Dotty, he escorted us in to the toilet seat of the crime, inside a ladies washroom that rivaled the Taj Mahal in ornateness. A sleek, stainless steel toilet squatted in a gilded stall, and is where the unnamed actress had perched. Detectives had already gathered butt-prints from the glossy seat, and taken all necessary photos, so they allowed me to set up our ingenious gatorat trap.

The ladies' room was jam-packed with people, including deli employees, customers and passersby, and more of the curious were pouring in all the time, but I

didn't think there was any danger to anyone in setting the trap.

I unzipped my backpack and extracted a shapely set of silicone buttocks, modeled on the rear end of a famous actress, who'd proudly allowed Biscuit take her butt-casts. I set the four pound contraption down on the stainless steel toilet's shiny mirror-like seat, and described to the curious Sgt. Walker and all those present, the operation of this fake derriere. I said, "If Stewie bites into this rump roast, his fangs will become embedded in the superglue and Styrofoam composite inside of it, and the gatorat will be stuck! Mission accomplished!"

All were amazed, but a coughing scoff from behind made me turn my head. I saw two rail thin women, who glared angrily, like they wanted to spank us. They pushed their way through the thickening throng of people towards Dotty, Mort and me. The press had arrived too now, and the police tape was a mere memory, as people

kept squeezing into the bathroom, until the walls bulged.

7

The two skinny women dressed alike, and each wore a pair of prefaded, pre-stressed, and probably pre-worn blue jeans, sandals and a bikini bra. The redheaded lady's hair was piled high in a frizzy bun, and the blonde wore a ponytail. Dotty identified their type instantly. She nudged me and said, "ACEM."

Red heard that somehow, blushed and said, "Uh yes. I'm Adrienne and this is Rosalie, and we advocate for co-existence with monsters. They are everywhere you see, and we just need to learn to live in peace with them."

I replied, with some venom, "I admit they are often less murderous than the monsters that look like you and me, but some are killers, and you might die in pieces with them instead."

More and more people pressed inside the luxurious restroom, as word spread about the incident. It was becoming claustrophobic, and that's when Stewart struck! The silicone rump lifted slightly off the seat, when the gator-rat erupted from the toilet water to slam into it, and sink his sharp fangs deep inside the fake buttocks!

It worked! Stewart was stuck! He couldn't retreat down the plumbing or climb out of the commode. We could hear his scrabbling feet and shrieks of frustration in the sudden human silence, when the mass of people suddenly froze in place and shut up. The reptilian rodent's teeth and jaws were glued into the butt-trap. Mort picked up the item with attached gatorat, and grabbed hold of Stewart's tail with his free hand. He held our trophy aloft to cheers and applause, and two skinny ladies who booed and hissed. Stewart shat.

8

I admit to fault, that whenin merry celebration of our early victory, I neglected to keep watch over our two ACEM fanatics. Rosalie casually walked up behind the six foot four inch, two hundred and forty pound Mortimer, and poked a two inch hatpin into his right triceps muscle. He jerked in surprise and pain and inadvertently dropped Stewart's tail. The fake rump and gatorat combo in his left hand, dropped closer to his body, and the clawed feet of the devilish brute made contact with Mort's belly.

Stewart tore and shredded at his gut, and Mort threw the butt-bound beast to the ground, in a desperate act of self-preservation! Mort's abdomen was ripped open, and his guts poked out through his shredded shirt and skin! People screamed at the bloody sight. He held himself together with his hands.

Stewart bit through the silicone rump, and though some foam was still cemented to its teeth, the creature

went absolutely berserk. The gatorat could jump like a flea, and it leapt and bounced, ricocheted and caromed, from wall to floor to ceiling, to head to counter to face to table, while screeching like a banshee!

People pushed and shoved, and crushed and trampled each other, like at a general admissions concert, to exit the narrow bathroom door all at once, screaming and crying out in fear! Stewart hopped and bounced off their heads and shoulders and children. The gatorat broke plates and glasses, and bottles and it damaged food, and scared the Hell out of everyone in the Deli, before reentering the lady's room, jumping back into the stainless steel toilet, and disappearing into the sewers.

9

Dotty and I tried to protect Mort from further damage, threatened by maniacal stampeding people, and we succeeded for the most part, though we were

jostled and shoved about, as if on a ship in a heavy sea. Mort and seven others were taken to local hospitals, by a caravan of ambulances, while dozens of police cars kept Rodeo Drive sparkling with flashing, colored lights.

The press journalists doubled, then trebled in number and presence, now that more injuries made coverage worthwhile. Dotty and I caught part of an interview with Gomez, of Leo's 24 Hour Plumbing, before we drove to the hospital to be with Mort. A man with fake hair and teeth, and representing a local TV station, held a microphone in the elder plumber's face and asked him, if he saw a lot of gatorats in his line of work.

Gomez scratched his chin's ten o'clock shadow, while he considered the question, and the scuffing noise of sandpaper on wood poured out of viewers' television speakers. He finally answered like this; he said, "Only when I collect my paycheck."

Mortimer underwent three hours of surgery. Dotty



called Soo-jin, Mort's wife, who had stayed home in Loveland, Colorado to nurse their young baby. The conversation didn't go well. Soo couldn't think of flying out to LA, or putting their child through the misery called airports, or in the company of weirds who often haunted flights. Soo-jin had to remain at home to worry, and be anxious from afar. Dotty remained positive and upbeat, and reminded Soo-jin of her husband's robust health, and obstinate character. She promised to keep Soo updated.

10

Dotty stayed with her nephew Mort in the recovery room, and I stayed with my wife. We fell asleep at some point, until an RN saw us, and decided it was time to turn on the lights, take Mort's vitals, and give him a shot of morphine.

I took the intrusive opportunity to read the ACEM manifesto to Dotty. She especially enjoyed the romantic

fantasy of Stewart's origin. To quote the pamphlet, "It's all about a sewer love story. Imagine a lonely alligator girl hanging around the major sewer intersections, waiting for Mr. Right, night after solitary night.

"After years of hopeless frustration, and nearing the end of her reproductive window, she espies a forlorn, but very horny, macho rat. They fall in love after a whirlpool romance, and although they came from different sides of the animal kingdom, love overcame all, and Stewart is the proof of their controversial love affair." It sounded like a cartoon musical in the making, like a West Side Story for sewers.

Dotty listened carefully, and after I completed the reading, she said, "Like you and me, but without the mutant kid." We never saw those two ACEM ladies again, but I think they may not be so pro-monster these days.

Biscuit joined us at the hospital a few hours later. We three decided that we were more determined than ever,

to snatch or exterminate the sewer rat-gator. Mort was eventually moved from recovery and up to his room. Biscuit kept him company there, while Dotty and I returned to the hotel to shower and take naps. Mort was awake and in good spirits when we left him.

11

Next morning, although neither Dotty nor I much felt like it, we drove to the parking lot behind the Pretty Soon Times Church of The Anxious, to attend the Stewartian worship service at eleven AM. We heard on the car radio while traveling, that the enraged gatorat had assaulted twice more in the wee hours this morning. It had chewed off part of a drunk's face and tore apart a stray dog.

It was a glorious morning, of golden sunlight, and there were perhaps sixty other attendees for the cult ceremony, comprising all makes and models, but Dotty and I found a few empty folding chairs in the back row,

and sat there. My interest in anthropology was well rewarded by observing the rites of the Stewartians, but my absurdity meter was pegged too. The cult's leader, Saint Thomas Knox exited a tent, and ascended a low stage. A slight breeze rippled the saint's, long black robe, embellished with bright white toilets, scaly green gatorats, and human rumps with missing mouthfuls.

Knox, according to our research, was a fifty-three year old frustrated poet and rap singer. The gatorat guru wore long white hair and a straggly, wispy beard, which had become a self-sustaining ecosystem, and a habitat for various parasites. He said, "Welcome to this sacred sacredness of a worship service, to praise the sacred name of Stewart, gatorat to the stars!"

At this cue, his four disciples emerged from the drab canvas tent, one male and three females. The young man, introduced as Milton, wore a red robe adorned with symbols of bums and toilet bowls, and the three young ladies wore skimpy miniskirt versions, in red,

white and blue.

12

Once all five of them were on stage, Saint Thomas, his disciples, and followers in the audience too, inscribed a circle in the air, to make the sign of the manhole. Then Knox began to stomp a foot and spit in rhythm. He started to rap, singing a hymn to Stewart. His four acolytes pulled percussion instruments out from beneath their clothes, to accompany the saint's raspy voice. Milton beat a cowbell with a stick, the twins Gina and Tina snapped tambourines, and the voluptuous Violet shook herself and a pair of gourd rattles.

I am embarrassed to include the words to this abomination masquerading as music, but in the interests of anthropology, I reluctantly include them here. Saint Thomas sounded as if choking, when he rapped:

“We call the gator-rat Stewart. He loves and lives in

the sewer. He's such a bad ass chewer, when you sit to take a dump. You be sittin' on you toilet, just tryin' to enjoy it, but Stewart will destroy it, and bite you in the rump. Rodeo Drive shoppin' stars; chunks missin' from their arse, buttocks with white bite scars, or men with just a stump.”

The twins kicked up their legs, which showed a lack of underwear, and at one point they turned their backs, raised their short hemmed skirts and bared their butts, which were tattooed with bite scars, to look as if missing a chunk. Anthropology be damned! We left, and returned to the hospital, where it was less depressing.

13

Mort was up and about, walking down the hallway with Biscuit when we arrived. The patient wore a girdle of sorts, around the staples that held his guts in. He'd already spoken to his wife, and all was well on the

home front; for now. The four of us returned to Mort's private room, and rehearsed Plan B. Obviously the trick butt was out, but we had a back-up scheme, and a Plan C if need be as well.

We couldn't bring the gatorat to us, so we had to go to Stewart. Plan B required Dotty and I to become sewer rats too. There was no feasible way to locate the gatorat, so we flushed it out and forced it to come to us. Mortimer and his wife Soo-jin had learned through intense research, and complex data analysis, that the sewer mutant was averse to, and avoided attacking bums that shadowed blue, chemically treated water.

Biscuit used this information to construct two dozen tidy-bowl bombs, which we dropped down manhole covers in a perimeter around Stewart's butt-hunting territory. These slow-spewing bomblets were placed ever closer to a central location, chosen by Dotty and I, after a sewer tour given us by a homeless guy, who said his name was Shanker. I didn't inquire further, but

he was a great sewer guide, and knew his way around better than most people know their own homes. He displayed his heaping collection of keys, found beneath street grates near parking curbs. He said he collected about five or six dollars in change daily and sometimes a shoe.

Shanker, a short, skinny, hairy gnome of a man, dressed in filthy thrift store chic, showed us his abode, which was in a deep dark hub underneath Santa Monica, where three sewer pipes intersected, and combined into one larger one. He rented it out to us for our projected encounter with Stewart, and we paid him a damage deposit to use his place too.

14

Once we'd placed our tidy bowl bombs, and hopefully herded Stewart towards Shanker's place, Dotty and I prepared for our descent into the gatorat's territory, while Biscuit joined Mort, who recuperated at the hotel,



to monitor our progress with a ground drone, we called a tankbot. Zeus, nearly ten years old, stayed with them; we didn't think he would fare well in the sewer tunnels.

Dotty and I used the cargo box on our monster truck as our dressing room. We donned miner's hats with bright lamps on them, black, padded, waterproof overalls, and shin-high rubber boots, respirators and night vision goggles. I carried my cane, plus a dart gun loaded with animal tranquilizer, and a steel mesh net with a long steel handle. Dotty toted Gravy, the monster suppression system invented by Biscuit.

Dotty and I hung out at Shanker's place, quietly, for twenty minutes before we spotted Stewart, scampering towards us, fleeing the tidy bowl toilet chemicals. We huddled in the darkest, most foul area of the intersection, to remain out of sight and smell of Stewart. The tankbot with infrared camera, sat near my feet.

As soon as the little monster made itself comfortable

on Shanker's bed, made of various pieces of discarded clothing, we attacked! I aimed my dart gun and shot two doses of animal tranquilizer into it, and Dotty shot a stream of superglue at the creature, from the barrel of Gravy, while the tankbot projected a delectable butt hologram, on the sewer tunnel wall to our left, in hopes to deflect the gatorat's attention from us.

15

Stewart, as expected, was not instantly subdued by the drugs shot into it, and the superglue stream landed mostly on its scaly tail, because it was already in motion! The beast reacted and moved more quickly than any living creature I'd ever seen, and it leapt at me! I had alerted to the whoosh of the darts, I'd shot.

The gatorat weighed no more than two or three pounds, but when the flying mutant collided with my head, it was with such force that I'm surprised it only caused my skull to fracture against the concrete tunnel

wall, and didn't break my neck. I saw no more for a time, because I lost consciousness.

Dotty later related that with each leap and ricochet, the gatorat bit or slashed at her. It destroyed the tankbot and bit through my multi-functional cane too! I awoke to see her KO'd, and the horrid monster suckled her blood, streaming, not spurting from Dotty's throat. I was gladdened that no artery was severed.

My night goggles were broken when my head was, and the only light filtered down from a street grate above us. I saw that Gravy was damaged and out of reach, the dart gun had no more ammunition, the tankbot was annihilated and my cane bitten in two. Stewart seemed to grin at me and my helpless condition, from two feet away, but I saw that its tail was glued to the tunnel floor. It was pinned there, and moved slowly, as if groggy. Perhaps the tranquilizers affected it now.

16

I reached down slowly, mechanically, hardly aware of my movement, and picked up the upper half of my damaged cane; with its wolf's head grip; a sharp, jag-ended titanium spear. Stewart's eyes bulged, and blood spurted from mouth and anus, when I viciously stabbed the cane through its guts, impaling the gatorat. It died after a few seconds of convulsions, and I smiled, and passed out again.

I woke up in an ambulance, for a minute or two, and I remember asking about Dotty. I don't recall the reply. She and I shared a room at the hospital, at the request of Mort and Biscuit, who'd called in the rescue squad first responders; and also secured the corpse of Stewart. They froze it for preservation.

There's little sense in relating the awful details of our hospital vacation, interrupted continuously for three days, by police officers, city officials, media representatives, Hollywood agents, and even the old

geezer from Leo's Plumbing Service. Suffice to say, we were exultant to depart from there.

When well enough, the four of us and Zeus, of MSI, bundled into the monster truck, with our gatorat on dry ice, and drove for three days to reach Monster Land Amusement Park in the Wisconsin Dells. TP Barnyard was characteristically unpleasant about the dead creature, and balked at paying us a million dollar bounty, for the shriveled, punctured corpse.

We reminded him that other buyers for our product existed, and he gave in. He sent Stewart to the same taxidermist as had stuffed the vampire eating monster we'd accidentally killed. Now the gatorat is on display in a transparent toilet, where it greedily looks upward at a descending butt.

17

Our next anti-monster crusade would take us to New Mexico, to snatch the vicious weresheep of Los Lunas.

# The Small Stroke

CRAIG LOOMIS

It is obvious to almost anyone who has paid any attention at all, who believes that this sort of thing is important, that he no longer cares about teaching, not one bit, but he has done it for so long that it is all he knows, and besides, at his age, it is too late to change.

But then came that one day in April when after a long morning of three writing classes back to back to back, and after reminding his students that they have no idea what they are doing, saying, writing--“You know nothing, nothing at all. Can’t write a complete sentence, know nothing about a thesis statement, nothing. It’s utterly amazing”--he went home, sat on the couch, slipped off his shoes and had what he would later call a small stroke: headache, a lost-in-the-desert thirst, unexplainable soreness and finally a numbness that gripped his left arm. Finding him sitting there

like that, his mouth opening and closing fishlike, his wife and three kids rushed him to the hospital, amid assorted screams of ‘*Baba*, no, . . . and ‘*Baba, lesh, lesh?*’ and so on. And it didn’t take much doctoring to determine he needed to stay in the hospital for three maybe four days, at the very least. Of course he insisted he couldn’t stay long because his students needed him, his know-nothing students needed to see him, to hear him, to finish their final papers, to . . . But the doctors were even more adamant, and with stethoscopes draped around their necks, his chart in hand, said, “No, absolutely not. You want to live to see 70 years? See your kids grow to be teenagers? Take a vacation away from teaching, the classroom, students, anything like final papers. You understand? In this case our doctoring trumps your doctoring, *sab*.” Everyone



agreed he needed to stay in the hospital, to stay away from those students, but, like always, he was against it. ‘This is all wrong, I tell you, all wrong.’

After day four, the same white-coated doctors stood at his bedside, slowly flipping through the pages of his chart, talking the talk of doctors, until finally they decided he was now ready for some bigger and better blood tests. He would have to stay another two days in the hospital. He cried when he heard this two-more-days part. ‘You cannot be serious.’ Who would badger his students, threaten them with bad grades, failure, an unsuccessful life? Who? Couldn’t any of them see that his students would never make it without him? Is he the only one who can see this? Meanwhile, his children with wife grabbed his IV-ed hand, pleading, ‘*Baba, lah, lah*. Please lie down, rest... *Baba*, we love you,’ and so on.

Later that night, one of the nurses wandered into his room just in time to hear him mumble, “I need them,

I need them, can’t you see. Can’t any of you see...?” before he slipped back into sleep. On his chart the nurse noted: “at 2:35am the patient had a mild bout of delirium which was probably due to the medication.”

# The German Doctor Goes Swimming

CRAIG LOOMIS

His t-shirt is a blackbrown with one of those handy breast pockets for pencils, pens, reading glasses. And after he carefully drapes his towel across the chair, making sure the green-side is up, he immediately jumps into the pool, expertly swimming to the deep end, where he turns and pushes off from the wall, taking long purposeful strokes, huffing and puffing like some water beast, back and forth, plowing through the bluey pool water. His t-shirt is now blacker, glistening, stuck tight to him like a second skin. At the shallow end are kids with goggles diving for pennies, the mother taking photos of them diving for pennies.

Everybody knows him as the German doctor, with blonde moustache and blonder eyebrows. He comes to the pool every day at the same time, except Sundays when he does not come at all. I have watched him

closely, this German doctor and yes, there is, come to think of it, something doctor-like about him, a certain leanness in the shoulders, gentle tapered fingers, not to mention that intelligent curl to his moustache.

It is a milky day that is surprisingly hot and windless, and somebody, somewhere is playing a radio, a ballroom music of another era, as two cats stroll by on their way to some place with shade. Meanwhile, he has not stopped swimming back and forth across the pool until suddenly, as if he knows all about what it means to be precise, he comes to a halt mid-pool, in mid-stroke and aims for the silver pool ladder. Once he climbs out he does something like a doggy shake—beads of water spraying into the air--before walking back to his towel on the chair along with something else gray and shiny that I didn't see the first time but

can only be a cellphone. And so begins the struggle to remove his wet-clingy t-shirt. It is a lengthy almost painful session of tugging here and there, as it refuses to let go, clinging tight to his chesty wetness. Finally, his face red from the wrestling, his hair cartoonish, with ruffled blonde moustache, the t-shirt is peeled off. I watch all from my chair, under the umbrella, behind sunglasses, with book in hand, as he squeezes the water from it, twisting it corkscrew-like, and now shaking it until it does its best to billow. By now the kids have found all the pennies and the mother motions for them to move closer together—“Smile, . . . closer, . . . smile”--so she can get one final photo.

The German doctor who swims wearing his t-shirt walks away, going back the way he came, through the creaky, wooden gate, towel over one shoulder, glistening black t-shirt over the other, all done for the today. Now the kids with pennies and goggles and mother bending over to show them the photos, have a good laugh.

# Incomprehensions of Sleep

ALEJO ROVIRA GOLDNER

The sound of the house the wolf ate  
seemed a violation of the soul's very protein  
and promised a swift seaquake.

We entered the white mouth  
of the burning monastery  
and viewed, in a darkness surrounded by  
land, dollars and branches,  
the excitement of the original painting:

It was as if the snow had been tasked  
with lying in rigid adherence to the shore  
and the melting sea waves.  
Stiff priestmonks kicked back and smoked.  
Only the shadows of Ukrainian kids—  
icons in every sense—ate ice cream.  
Then the whole scene slid downstairs into  
a glass of black pepper and ocean  
and a treasury of boyfriend videos.  
The weather worsened and disapproved.

Little did we know, as we exited the mouth,  
how much had been stolen from us.  
Wolves everywhere stabbed each other in the scalp.  
Neither Ukraine nor Ohio functioned.  
Little did we know, walking down aisles  
and aisles of DuckDuckGo, that our faces, splitting  
into three here or two there,  
had quarreled themselves into  
brittle walls of tenderloin for the pack.



# Fuck Me All You Want but No Feelings

ALEJO ROVIRA GOLDNER

He felt the kiss-assault of his four voices:  
Isabella the curvaceous Irishman  
Gladys the CIA emergency rat  
a dumb mutawakazi also known as God  
and, finally, outranking all the above,  
Disney Man the Human Purifier.  
Clinging to sunscreen and anal freeze  
and his father's eight-inch semi-automatic,  
his eyes filled slowly with massage parlor, schoolyard,  
church, Wal-Mart, Super Bowl, Supreme Court, U.N.  
and other countries of lame chickens.  
Isabella said "When you have a difficult eye in your life  
there are many others who will see forever after  
what your eyes look like" and Gladys said  
"Blame the sea waves with their carousels and games"  
and God said "When there's no love, there's love"  
but Disney Man the Human Purifier thundered  
"The brain of Bryce Canyon commands you: Kill."

He longed for deafness or sleep of night  
but the choir of rascals didn't stop,  
in fact they filled ballrooms with every wrong.  
On Dad's Day he felt like a jock stud and loved it.  
Enraged with a bangwank kiss, his young fingers worked,  
unloaded every time he saw signs of socialism  
or a mask or a black or brown face or an obscure word,  
he sent forty-eight to eternal life, his four voices cheered  
but Disney Man cheered the most uproarious.  
A family of white birds flew up.  
Then he lifted a burning football from its display case  
and, with wise arrogance, drank its molten gold.  
Ballet shoes and lacrosse sticks littered his gullet  
happiness to happiness.



TATIANA MCCLURE





# Double-O

S.A.A. RIZVI

There was once a boy in my school whose name was Oosama and he had really thin hair and we used to pull it from his scalp. I remember the days when we used to take out coins and rub them against his head. Soon thereafter, we had made a bald spot.

His parents took him out of the school and put him in an army-run school where discipline flourished. The fact that we, as in all his friends, had to repeat a grade because of disciplinary action had become the school's favorite topic to discuss at lunch and dismissal.

A few days after he left our school and joined the army-run school, we learnt that some boys from his new school had burned off all his hair, chunked him in a dumpster outside school, and left him to rot amongst potato peels and carrot heads.

One day, as I headed home after dismissal at school, I

saw him sitting under a tree in the park near our school and crying.

“Hey man, what’re you doing out here crying and what not?” I said.

“They ripped all my hair out at this school, and burned it in the other,” he said through fat tears.

“It’ll grow out, man. Don’t worry. I mean, I’ve seen my dad. He was bald and all a few months ago and now he has lush green, I mean brown, hair. Green, ha ha,” I said.

“I mean nothing to no-one,” he said.

“Hey man, don’t go on crying like that. You’re my good friend, alright? I’ll take care of you,” I said.

“Everyone hates me except for you,” he said.

I took Oosama home and gave him soup in a cup, putting it next to him on a wooden table. Oosama

reeked of rotten vegetables. He lifted the plastic cup and put it against his lower lip, twirling his eyes around the room and absorbing it. His gaze met mine and I couldn't dare look straight at him, so I looked away. He had bluish-brown eyes and a mole under his lip. He kept scratching his head and his hair fell out into the cup, but he kept drinking the soup.

I took out my small, handheld radio device from my pocket and put it out in plain sight, smiling at Oosama. The device had been the latest model of its kind. I snuck out a tweezer from my mom's bedroom and pressed the tiny reset button on the bottom of the device; I wanted to give it to Oosama, to cheer him up a little bit. Poor guy, I thought, wouldn't even know what device it is. I'd spent a considerable amount of money on it.

I went and sat on the windowsill and watched as Oosama curiously inspected the device. I asked him if he'd like to keep it and he said sure. He held the device

in his hand and said,

"I don't deserve this. I don't deserve this."

"No-one has a right to tell you that," I said.

He slipped it into his pocket. It felt like he would show his entire family this device, put it out on display for everyone to see. That same evening, he returned to my home saying his mother wouldn't allow this gift; and being raised in my family, I'd been taught to give back gifts was bad manners. I made a face at him.

"Won't you be a good man and keep it?" I said.

"Mom won't allow it. Besides, if I keep it, everyone besides me in my family would use it. There's no point," he said.

"Forget it, then," I said.

I think he lost my favor, then. I appreciated the fact that he returned my device to me, but it'd been a gift from me to him. He should've accepted it. Something had gotten in the way of our little friendship. I made sure I ignored him the next time I saw him sitting



under the tree near school and crying so that he didn't take me for granted. I mean, I'd been a blessing in this guy's life, and he—ah, well, forget it. It's no use sitting and whining over what he did. It had been my utmost pleasure, that I had given him something I held dear to myself, and now he'd decided not to keep it. Nobody likes a gift returned.

I think he doesn't deserve to be happy. I played good old friend to him, I invited him to my home when he reeked of potatoes, but he humiliated me amongst other things. Now that I recall, he didn't even take his shoes off before he entered my home. What about all the times I gave him money to use at the school's canteen? His mother wasn't ashamed of that? Give him a radio and everyone has a problem.

"I'm going to burn his house down, just you watch, because apparently my gift wasn't good enough for him to accept," I said to Muhim, my friend.

"Don't be silly," said Muhim. "You're a grown up.

Besides, who cares about Oosama anyway? He's no longer even in our school. I'm not surprised he rejected your gift. I mean, we pulled half his hair out."

"My ass," I said, but then I really felt for the guy.

My girlfriend, Zulekha, who had a thing sticking out of her hair, stood in the hallway crushing her fingers. She looked perfect; the sound of her voice in my ears, her skin warm and tingly; I was drunk in love. The people around me didn't believe I was.

"Be wise," they told me.

But she gave me joy and I knew it. The sky had been beautiful above, and below it I saw her smiling right back at me.

"I was thinking about you," I said to her.

"Show it," she said.

The skinless warm bloodclot leaves  
throb on the springtime tree.

“No water.”

murmurs the mother,  
and the father goes out to seek.

Shelling continues to drill the time.

They wait for the father. They feel  
the fire in their throats, metal on their tongues.

Their cat waits to devour those.

The explosion stirs the leaves,  
and they scream as if

they gush out burning from the school building.

“No water.” She says. “No father.”

Says the child. Shelling continues to drill time.

## Building is Burning

KUSHAL PODDAR

# Orgasms

KUSHAL PODDAR

## I

The summer crawls over the hills  
one noontime. Our shutters down,  
on the sunless bed your revirginated  
sea swells and ebbs.  
My nose and mouth feel like flypapers  
with all your sour and salt water.

I crave to desire summer, welcome it,  
but our town at the foot of the hills  
takes the worst whipping,  
stays a bondage of the heat  
until we writhe to recall the safe-word.  
Sometimes it is 'Lemonade',  
and often, 'Kiss'.

## II

The summer laundry pays homage  
to the martyred water,  
salutes your taut red underwear  
on the clothesline.

The zephyr stirs the pennon.  
Two doves coo in our dust wrapped yard  
as we make love somewhere inside.

Inside.

There exists a place where invasion  
has no victim, and the consent negotiates  
through our irises, and when we collapse  
as ruins we erect good memories for the history.

My manhood coos now, a tired peace-bird.  
You free it inside the cage formed with your fingers.

# Mirabilia

KUSHAL PODDAR

I

The other window ferries light  
to and fro, albeit  
I stand with this  
looking down at the garden gnomes  
talkative with the breeze.  
Their common tongue, silence,  
tears through my curtains.

In the evening atmo  
breeze blazes into the aurora borealis.  
I hold onto the bedpost  
of the rectangle where my mother sleeps.

II

It snowed near the beach,  
summer hot Pacific,  
and for once we all become  
some lowly fishermen  
who lost their boats and their wives  
to the Lord of the bottles.  
We scoop ice covered sands and eat.  
The mirabilia of the ships  
sunk centuries ahead rise and cruise  
into the hearts of our insanelly sane mothers.



You paint the walls  
creamy white, the light fixture  
white, and through the window  
shines the sun.

You use only titanium white,  
a thick brush, no thinner.  
Dry on dry. Like a cat scratching  
you cover the canvas

as the sun shines  
through the window of the studio.  
It must be day break,  
or the longest evening.

The room calls like youth  
to age, woman to man, summer  
to winter. Grief tries to enter  
and you squash it like a bug.

## A Bright White Room

JUDITH SKILLMAN

# Trapped Alive for Five Months in a Delicatessen

(An Opening For TAFFMIAD)

WILL ACKERMAN

For one giant economy-sized summer I was indentured to a grocery/deli/sports store as a sort of assistant manager/clerk/ stock boy/janitor/complaint department. Out front, like an errant thought lingering above the door, was a red, white and blue neon sign that patriotically declared:

“OPEN ALL NIGHT!”

The “O” in “OPEN” flickered, like it was winking. As though it was knew something no one else was privy to.

I always closed the store at 11:00 P.M. Manager’s orders. Then I went home. Why go out if “all night” is over?

That damn “O” was right.

## Food stamps Are Forever

Regular customer down the block from the store wanted to buy an Alfa Romeo with Food Stamps. Said he saw a Texan on television (on a talk show dedicated to cutting edge insanity) who ate a ten-speed bicycle in Tokyo. Said it took the man a bunch of weeks but he consumed the entire thing a chop sticked piece of magnesium alloy and rubber and vinyl sashimi at a time.

“I bin gettin’ Food Stamps for five years, eight months, fourteen days and some odd hours, and the Welfare Mafia gots title to everything I ever called my own.

“If it can be ett and ain’t s’posed to be warmed up

like soup or them plastic sam-wiches and whatnot,” he said, “then it qualerfies for Food Stamps.”

“Nope,” I said. I was authoritative. I, after all, was wearing the apron. “They’ll never allow it, Sam. Not an Alfa Romeo. Maybe a 1991 Geo but never an Alfa Romeo.”

Six months later I ran into him and asked how he made out.

“It was delicious,” he said. “I ett it in Milan with 7,046 side-orders of linguini.”

### \$52,000 and Hold the Rye

A seven-year-old kid in the neighborhood made \$52,000 in the five months I worked at the store by running 104,000 errands at fifty cents an errand.

He knew the prices in that store better than I would have if I had been shackled to the shelving for the rest of my adult life.

“Time’s money!”

He would blur through the door; flurry around the aisles in a tangle of hands and feet and, with a magical blush of dust, he’d be gone. The correct change always rattled to a stop on the counter in front of me, the coins waffling like little lost hubcaps from little gone cars.

Whatta kid!

If he lives long enough—say to see eight or nine—and doesn’t get squashed by a truck or assassinated by UPS, he’ll probably join the NSA.

### To Pause or Not

A girl—a young lady actually—came in. She was pregnant. She was always pregnant.

I only worked in the store for a short time, but I had seen her turtling around the neighborhood before and she was pregnant then. Later—long after I was paroled

from the store—she was still pregnant. She’s probably pregnant now.

I guess she likes it: being pregnant that is.

Elephants gestate for something like twenty months.

Maybe her mother was goosed by an elephant.

### Absolutely No Personal Checks!

We had this sign hanging behind the counter. It was green and yellow like the flag of an emerging African country. The sign read:

**ABSOLUTELY NO PERSONAL CHECKS!**

Just like that except that the “no” was underlined so many times that it looked like a “no” rocket lifting off from Cape Canaveral. NO!

Every night, when I took over from the afternoon shift, there would be around one hundred seventy-six checks circling the cash register caught in small negative orbits.

“Da manager, he cashes ma cheks,” a talking truck claimed from the other side of the counter. He said it just like that: “C-H-E-K-S.” There was no room in his life for silent c’s.

“Maybe he does, but I can’t,” I explained. I pointed to the sign with its little nervous “no.” “I’m not allowed,” I said. “It’s a rule.”

“Da manager—”

“He’s allowed to. He’s da ... er, the manager.” I looked up into the high beams of his headlamps and the missing dental work of his grill and my voice sounded to me like it was stuck in the ice cream freezer with the Nutty Buddies and the Klondike bars.

“Ah’m gonna pull off yore legs,” said the truck. He said this very deliberately so there would be no mistake on my part. He looked down at my legs and began to make a wish.

“How’d you like that? A ten and two fives okay?”

\*\*\*\*\*



“No personal checks,” the manager bellowed. He always bellowed.

The manager was an Italian guy who looked like Mussolini—upright not hung upside down—and was named Vitiello. He was built like a sausage skin over-filled with riccota cheese.

“Don’t see me takin’ no personal checks,” he proclaimed.

“I don’t see you at all,” I said. He was always gone before I got there. “Besides, that guy was going to cram me in an empty Miracle Whip jar and ship me to Zambia.”

“Shoulda gone,” snarled the manager. “Zambia ain’t bad this time a year.”

He had Mussolini’s compassion too.

### Lesson in Economics, Part A

When I was growing up we’d do just about anything

for money. For instance, we used to collect rags and paper and tin and iron and steel and lead and aluminum and brass and copper and bronze, and when we got enough we’d go to the scrap yard and sell it for cash. Aluminum was the best because it paid well per pound and there was a lot lying around unattended. Brass and copper and bronze paid better, naturally, but they were about as plentiful as Passenger Pigeons in our neighborhood.

So we’d collect all those things and then take them down the road to the scrap yard and fight with the red haired Jewish guy who practically charged us to take the stuff off our hands so he could peddle it later at a ridiculous profit. But we did it anyway. We needed money because we didn’t have very much and that seemed important to us at the time.

Rags and paper and tin and iron and steel and lead and aluminum and copper and brass and bronze. Ah ... the good old days.

I really thought that sort of drive, initiative, was dead. You know: Kids today ain't got no incentive! Not enough good old fashioned greed. The world's going to hell in a borrowed hand basket!

But I was wrong. Painfully wrong.

One night while I was working at the store a quiet, well groomed, unassuming lad came through and collected all those things: rags and paper and tin and iron and steel and aluminum and brass and copper and bronze. He collected them to take down the road to sell, and he did his collecting all at once!

He stole my car.

### A Dog's Life

Elderly couple without concerned kids or pets of any kind came in twice a week right at closing. They would hide behind the telephone pole across the street and watch until the store was emptied and I had my hand

on the red "CLOSED" sign in the door. Then they'd bark at me and charge.

"Six pack of canned dog dinner to go," the old gentleman would say. And, that quickly, they'd be gone, chasing each other back across the street.

### Lesson in Economics, Part B

"What's the difference between this loaf of white, basically unproteinaceous, sliced, enriched bread with virtually no Vitamins A or C and only traces of Thiamine, Riboflavin, Niacin, Calcium, or Iron and the loaf you usually have for seventeen cents less?"

The questioner was a distinguished looking gentleman in a two hundred dollar hair cut and Brooks Brothers three piece suit and the sensitive sentient eyes of an IRS inquisitor.

I mulled over my answer very carefully. "About five slices of bread," I answered with what I thought to be a

certain mercantilistic verve.

“That’s well out of line with the price per slice of the rest of the slices in these loaves,” he observed. He put away his reading glasses, gold case of course, slipped the case into his vest. The offending loaf was clutched in one manicured hand.

“We’re out of the chea ... ah, less expensive loaves,” I explained.

“I don’t require the additional slices,” he counter-explained.

“Tomorrow we should have the other kind.” I counter-counter-explained.

“I don’t care to ask my man to make another stop.”

I glanced out the front window to where his “man,” resplendent in blue livery and bluer boredom, leaned against a car longer than Moldavia.

“I understand,” I said. It used to cost something like \$27,000 an hour to take the QEII for a spin around the harbor. The economics was pretty easy.

“Well...?” He eloquently placed the bread on the counter and pushed it gently toward me with two manicured fingertips.

I looked at him. I looked down at the affronting loaf. I looked at the car. I looked at the “man.” I looked back to the loaf.

It was a dilemma.

“What do you intend to do about it?” The gentleman asked this as though it were the final exam for a seminar on Business Incentive For Semiliterate Subordinates. He delicately dropped eighty-three cents in change on the counter (The correct price of the chea—less expensive loaf.) and slid the coins toward me as though poling kibbles to a muskrat.

With a deft swipe I transferred the money from the counter top to the ledge of the cash register. He reached for his prize.

“Just a moment.”

I picked up the bread, untwisted the twist tie, reached

into the heart of the package and withdrew five slices of white basically unproteinaceous ... etc. I then tossed those over my shoulder, where they sailed onto and bounced off of the aspirin rack. I retwisted the twist tie and handed the less-expensived loaf over.

Outside his “man,” who had been observing the entire transaction, yodeled into hysterics and toppled out of sight behind Moldavia.

### Outflanked in a Delicatessen

“Just come from Reserve NCO school,” a youngish fellow in green Army fatigues and a green Army fatigue cap and black regulation Army boots informed me.

I didn’t say anything because I couldn’t think of anything to say. I handed him his change and nodded and arched my eyebrows in an attempt to look appropriately enough impressed that he might just go away. I failed.

“That’s Noncommissioned Officer’s School,” he con-

tinued. I arched my eyebrows higher still. “That’s a trainin’ school to become a noncommissioned officer in the United States Army Reserve.” He intoned “United States Army Reserve” as if each syllable were a separate word, and it came out sounding longer than the entire text of The Book of Revelations.

He studied me for a reaction. If my eyebrows got much higher they were going to slide off the back of my head, so I said:

“Oh?” Precise and blanketing the target.

“Yep,” he nodded. He took two sticks of strawberry gum from the pack he’d just purchased, field-stripped and stuck them both into his mouth. I guess that’s how they train noncommissioned officers to do it.

“Sandrat Raghead Pinkos in Ghanistan kilt my brother dead,” he said.

I knew the eyebrow thing was doomed to failure so, despite misgivings, I commented, “I see.” And just about did see.



“Rolled a jeep over on him.” His face clouded grimly, which wasn’t easy considering it was buried beneath multiple layers of green, brown and black camouflage grease paint. And I didn’t “see” anymore.

I tried to picture this enormous Afghanistani Taliban nutcase flinging a jeep at a hapless GI, but the scene absolutely refused to gel. Too many of the folks I’d known who ended up in the Middle East chose less exotic ways to get wounded or dead over there.

“He was in a race with another jeep and lost his control,” the camouflage paint stated.

Dawn shown over Kabul.

“Oh?”

“But if them Sandrat Raghead Pinkos hand’t’ve been a fightin’ us, he wouldn’t a bin there to get hisself kilt to death.”

“Yeah. I guess you got a point.”

“Raghead Pinkos,” he growled. He properly adjusted the brim of his cap, chomped furiously at his gum and

advanced out the door.

I was sorry for any “Raghead Pinkos” he might chance onto in the next few highly emotionally charged moments and felt not a bit safer for having met him.

### A Little Delicatessen Pedantry is a Dangerous Thing

“You got any a that there baked round ham?” a little porcine guy with horn rimmed glasses asked. He had a head as hairy as a freshly cleaned bowling ball, and ears attached to the side like shelf fungus on a bald oak tree.

I bent down and peered into the meat case to confirm what I already knew I knew. (They never believe you can actually remember something as complicated as what meats you might have left without first looking.)

“Nope. All out. Got pepper, chopped and Cappacola’s all.”

“Capp ... cap ... ca ...?” His face scrunched up into

little fleshy folds of lard-laden bacon. “What’s that?” he wanted to know.

“Cappacola. It’s Italian ham,” I informed him. “Spicy. Kinda hot.”

“Oh.” His face unscrunched. “Hot ... huh?” he asked doubtfully.

“Not terribly hot. Just spicy.”

”Cappa ... cap ... cap ... ca ....”

“C-a-pp-a-c-o-l-a,” I said, always try to be helpful. “But some Italians pronounce it more like: ‘Gaa-ppa-gooool!’” I was shamelessly showing off knowledge gained from bygone days of dating a nymphomaniac of Italian heritage and an appetite that portended a shape like the dome of Saint Paul’s cathedral.

His little olive-black eyes inflated and his wet lips dribbled into each other like all-meat franks as he soundlessly mouthed this magical word for himself. Then, finally comfortable with his mastery, he ventured back into the audible world.

“Gim’me a third pound of that there gaaa-perr-gooool.”

And I, in that single fleeting moment, realized I had unleashed another monster onto the unknowing, sensitive, conversation-starved world. How many insane places would he find to use his new word? How many diverse ways could he thrust it into the heart of an otherwise healthy dialogue that would quickly collapse and bleed to death? How many lonely souls craving a little simple verbal exchange would be driven forever into a brooding silence for its intrusion?

Guilt stomped all over me.

“A third pound of this here hot ham?” I begged. “The hot ham ... huh?”

But he just scrunched up contentedly. It was far too late.

## One End for TAFFMIAD

Cash register closed-out and locked.

Had all the aisle lights shut off.

The big neon sign with its CIA secretive “O” was dark.

The “Open” sign in the window was down.

The big red “Closed” sign on the door was faced out for all the buying world to acknowledge and be advised.

I was mopping the floor. It seemed about the size of the flight deck on the USS Enterprise.

Unbelievably, the guy hammering at the door kept right on doing so. He beat at it with the meat of one hand and mushed nose prints onto the freshly Win-dexed glass. I finally dropped the mop and unlocked the door to see what he wanted.

“You closed?” he asked. He was leaning radically to one side to see around the “Closed” sign.

I nodded, afraid of what I might say if I actually tried

to speak.

“Oh.” He walked away.

Song for a Broken Door  
GARY CAMPANELLA

Later we found shards in the gold carpet,  
Even after the vacuum buzzed, our secrets lost,

Even after weeks, the splintering echo  
And the punishing thud of boots on a hollow door,

The fainter hopes for decorum restored  
Faded, like so much thunder rolling out to sea.

I carried the remnants to the street,  
Thinking someone else should do this, anyone really,

One large piece scraped the wall above the handrail,  
And I stumbled once, spraying fragments in the hallway.

Gathering them all with my unwashed hands,  
I set them out on the sidewalk.



# Gravid

E.T. MESSAL

God got caught  
backstroking up her upper  
left arm. How  
do i know? i  
was sweat clenched-hands emptying  
myself down mine and up into the same.  
Panic-entangled in a below-god undertow  
was when in my drownstruggle i glimpsed  
His immutable butt above me. *Busted*.

The galaxies' herpredicament  
presumptions fulminated  
enfeebly-hidden right behind  
the crystal-crusted ceilingspray  
left there for her to stare at  
lying there  
in her way.

She'd made it,  
she remembered  
wound-up wings wildly-wheeling and  
netlessness knee-teetering,  
1/2 way  
across the tree trunk spanning  
the narrow engorge,  
33 1/3 RPMs down to its skull-crush basal.  
Stuck,  
all she had now  
was this  
new  
can't-go-back/frozen-going-forward  
that western civ's evolution-to used to  
extricate one out of.

So, each pine, she remembered,  
surrounding her log-crossing-or-not  
took turns turning rustorange  
as they watched  
as if her reflected facefrenzy's and their friendly  
needlegreen  
was no longer needed.

Everyonething without its power cord plugged in  
tried to help.

Her bookshelf's  
warped-with-weight woodshelves  
began reading those books  
for her  
she'll never now  
get to.  
(If you'll be quiet for *just* a few, you'll hear 'em gasping and giggling  
*for* her. Hear?)

She'll make it through with or without  
the usual: the inseminators' usedlessness,  
any up-the-arm god up to what? No good?

Preggers'll peril ya way past past passions provoked  
by a mentalbedmentor now rocket-shipped off  
to perp a new planned community with better  
not so bitter  
resident  
prospects  
a pithy six  
wormholes away.

Her arm emptied now of both deities and me she  
at least has a future fetus to  
trot out for show, to  
lean hard against in those times, to  
try all her mistakes on, to

receive all the unearned 'n earned 'n urned unequivocal  
from, *and*  
if things work out  
like they're prone to do,  
like they're always done to the prone,  
you and I, a phone each  
for our hands  
just standing around like rustorange pines,  
she'll always have  
that ceiling.





THE LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF LOS ANGELES

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